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His Holiness Writes...

Blessings to you all,

According to the Ecclesiastical calendar, we celebrated the feast of the Holy Cross which commemorates the recovery of the Holy Cross by Queen Helena on 14th September. Thereafter we enter the 'Sleeba kaalam'. The relevance of Cross is ever remarkable in the life of a Christian. "Everything is a reminder of the Cross. We ourselves are made in the shape of a cross. You must accept your cross. If you bear it courageously, it will carry you to heaven" (St. John Vianney). May the power of the Holy Cross empower us to bear our cross and to translate our suffering and sacrifices into Blessings and favors from God.

For the Malankara Orthodox Church, the month of September was remarkable because of the historic visit of the Church delegation under our leadership to Russian Orthodox Church and to His Holiness the Pope Francis. It was a sacred journey to strengthen our bilateral relations with two great churches.

During the first part of our journey, we visited the Russian Orthodox Church, which we consider as one among our sister churches. They accorded us a great reception and welcome as the Supreme head of Malankara Orthodox Church. We visited many important centers of Russian Orthodox Church like Churches, Monasteries, Convents, and Diocesan Centres. For us it was an opportunity to visit Leningrad Theological Academy, where we had our Theological higher studies during 1977-79. We visited The Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill at Moscow and attended the Holy Qurbana Celebrated by Patriarch Kirill at the Cathedral of Christ the Savior, Moscow and exchanged mutual greetings of both the Churches.

In the second phase of our visit, from Russia we travelled to Rome to meet His Holiness the Pope Francis

at Vatican. This historic encounter between the leaders of two great Christian traditions underscores the importance of fostering global understanding and fraternity in today's world. This was our first visit to Vatican as the Catholicos of Malankara Orthodox Church. Vatican received us with all ecclesiastical honors as the Head of a sister Church. We also received a rare privilege to celebrate Holy Qurbana at the Church near the tomb of St. Paul at Vatican. The delegation from Malankara Orthodox Church also visited St. Peter's Basilica, Sistine Chapel and other important centers at Vatican. Both the visits are a testament to the enduring spirit of brotherhood and cooperation.

The 100th memorial feast of H. G. Alvares Mar Julius of blessed memory was celebrated in St. Mary's Orthodox Syrian Church, Panaji, Goa on 22nd and 23rd September. H.G. Alvares who joined the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church from the Catholic Church was elevated as Metropolitan of Goa, Ceylon and Greater India in the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church. Even if he was persecuted by the Catholic Church and the Portuguese Government, the Goan historians have portrayed him as a Patriot and Saint. His multifaceted roles as social worker, educationist, journalist, writer and more over his role to support and rehabilitate the poor and downtrodden made him known among the believers as 'the Apostle of the Poor'. We pay our tribute to the remarkable life and work of H. G. Alvaris Mar Yulios. His unwavering commitment to serving the marginalized and his dedication to social justice have left an indelible mark on our community and his legacy continues to inspire us all.

BASELIOS MARTHOMA MATHEWS III

Catholicate Palace, Devalokam.

October 1st, 2023

Editorial

It is a matter of great pleasure and pride that our country was able to host the G20 Leaders' Summit in a marvellous manner recently. This global meet held in New Delhi on 9-10 September 2023 discussed many pertinent challenges the world is facing today by upholding the unique theme 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'. The first sentence of the Preamble of the G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration - "We are One Earth, One Family, and We share One Future" - is really a hopeful spiritual vision also. This vision is a call to live in harmony with all humans, all diverse communities and non-human creation. If all especially the leaders could think, plan and act in the light of this profound vision, our world will become a joyous family, a community of communities ensuring planetary well-being.

Love, peace, justice and unity are integral parts of the spiritual vision of all major religions. Thus ancient sages in India taught Advaita vision and world as one family highlighting the unity of all. When one Creator God is depicted as an Abba Father, the whole creation is presupposed as one family. It is noticeable that Jesus who revealed this mystery in a unique way is introduced in the Gospel as "great joy that will be for all the people" (Luke 2:10). Also the Golden verse "whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them" can be seen in the scriptures of almost all religions. Modern science is also affirming this vision of the unity of the whole world.

In spite of having such lofty ideas and exemplary visions of the harmony of the whole world associated with the religious world, it is a fact that there are extremists who misuse their communal loyalty and religious sentiments to promote animosity towards other religious communities and try to bring about communal polarisation and violence. Since the fanatics fail to give importance to the ethics and core spiritual vision of their religions while overemphasising the external aspects of these, it is easy for them to promote communalism for selfish political and economic gains. Even if we have heard about the hate speeches and violence of some political leaders and religious fanatics, the recent news from UP about a

teacher instructing her students to slap a classmate who belongs to a minority religious community was a heart breaking one. 'Guru' is one who removes darkness from the hearts of his or her students. What we need is not merely declarations or preaching of political, religious and professional leaders about one earth and one family, but true Guru-leaders' genuine interventions to guide us all to a bright future of harmony and peace. By being faithful to their particular country or party or religion or institution, they will accomplish this mission. 'Rooted openness' will give a healing touch to our world groaning because of manifold conflicts, wars and communal violence.

H.G. Paulos Mar Gregorios whose feast will be on November 24th reminds us about this great vision of harmony of the whole world while being faithful to the Christian faith thus: "The Church must receive a new vision of the whole of humanity- men, women and children, people of all races and all religions, a humanity in which all members can live with the same dignity, in justice and peace, and an environment that sustains and promotes life. The Church exists for the sake of that humanity. The unity of the Church is directly related to the unity of humanity.It is this vision of Christ and His love for the whole of humanity that the Church needs to recover. That love must be the basis for both the unity of the Church and the unity of humanity." (*On Ecumenism* p.156).

Shri. Oommen Chandy, former CM of Kerala who integrated his Orthodox Christian faith and deep humanitarian commitment and service to all without any discrimination is one of the greatest Gurus who is continuing to enlighten us even after his death. Venerable homage also to H.G. Zachariah Mr Anthonios former Bishop of Kollam Diocese who blessed us through his exemplary Orthodox Christian witness and enlightening leadership.

Bijesh Philip Achen

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MAR ANTHONIOS OF BLESSED MEMORY:

A TRUE MONK, SHEPHERD AND TEACHER

Fr. Dr. Jacob Kurian

St. Anthonios, the ancient Christian hermit of Egypt, is known as the founder-father of Christian Monasticism. After many centuries, His Grace Zachariah Mar Anthonios exemplified through his life a true monk, a true shepherd and a true teacher for our own times. I was fortunate to be a batch -mate of Mar Anthonios at the Old Seminary, Kottayam, in the 1969-73 batch. We were 21 in that batch and one among us became the Catholicos and another, the Metropolitan of the Church. Mr. K. I. Paul became 'His Holiness Baselios Mar Thoma Paulos II' (1946-2021) and Mr. W. A. Cherian became 'His Grace Zachariah Mar Anthonios' (1946-2023). Since we started the Seminary course when the Church enjoyed

the 1958 peace-settlement and Knanaya Diocese was one of our Dioceses, two out of the twenty-one were from the Knanaya Diocese. One of the Knanaya students, Mr. V. A. Abraham became the Vicar-General of the Knanaya Community.

Mr. W. A. Cherian was one of my best friends in the Seminary and he was even my mentor in many things. He was a person of unique integrity and maturity during his student days at the Seminary itself. The whole batch enjoyed the warmth of his friendship and brotherly affection. This was particularly evident, when after 50 years many of us came together with him, to celebrate our 'Golden Jubilee' batch meeting, in November 2022

at the Old Seminary.

Mar Anthonios hailed from a traditional Orthodox Christian Family in Punalur. The family had excelled in piety and Christian virtues. Cherian, after his graduation from the Seminary (he was already a degree holder of Kerala University), opted to stay with his Diocesan Metropolitan and spiritual hero, Metropolitan Mathews Mar Coorilos of Quilon Diocese (later 'His Holiness Baselios Marthoma Mathews II). Being a devoted disciple of Mar Coorilos, Fr. W. A. Cherian assisted him in Diocesan matters especially as the 'Manager of the Aramana' and as Secretary of the Diocese. As a celibate priest Fr. Cherian was exemplary in his monastic and pastoral commitments. In 1991 he was consecrated Bishop along with four others. He had to be the shepherd of two Dioceses, first of Cochin and then of Quilon. The most outstanding quality of Mar Anthonios was that he made himself available to his people all the time. And it was stamped by the fact that he never had a passport.

It is a salient feature of all the Orthodox Churches to have only 'monks' to be consecrated as bishops. Even though it is a practice accepted in the latter part of the early centuries, it had the clear message that bishops are basically detached from the temptations of carnal desires, worldly wealth and power of authority. Mar Anthonios was beautifully committed to keep these vows close to his heart of hearts. On many occasions we have observed how innocent minds become prey to the strong allurements of flesh, world and satanic power play. But Mar Anthonios never succumbed to such things.

Mar Anthonios was literally a monk even when he beautifully carried out his administrative responsibilities. His life-style and work-style had always a 'Christ-likeness' in it. Unlike some others who were very busy with continuous foreign trips, project-campaigns and crazy pastoral visits in luxurious cars, Mar Anthonios projected nothing more than what his ordinary sheep could afford to offer. One thing he earnestly held close to his heart was not to ask for money unless it was essential for the routine needs of the Diocese. As a person who had the nostalgic memories of a peaceful Malankara Church, he always hoped for a peaceful settlement of the litigations the church was involved in. He was not an orator, but he was an effective teacher and preacher. His words were the

cream of wisdom, particularly 'practical wisdom'. He used to write a column in the Malankara Sabha Magazine (of which he was President for a term), and what he wrote was 'guru-sutras' according to the ancient Indian Heritage. One of his young disciples, Fr. John Sleeba, compiled and published some of his proverbial comments in the form of a book.

Mar Anthonios' spirit of detachment was finally displayed when he courageously took the decision to retire from his Episcopal responsibilities after having carried them out 'most meaningfully' for more than three decades. Fr. Kuriakose, another disciple of Mar Anthonios, who personally attended to him for many years, proudly commented on how satisfied and peaceful Mar Anthonios was at Mar Anthonios Dayara, Mallapally, after his retirement.

His saintly departure to his heavenly abode on Sunday, 20 August 2023, was the climax event of Mar Anthonios stepping up the ladder of divine ascent. Being entombed at Horeb Dayara Chapel premises, Sasthamcotta, he continues his heavenly pilgrimage along with and in the 'foot-prints' of his great guru and spiritual father H.H. Baselios Marthoma Mathews II.

Mar Anthonios of blessed memory continues to give us a message and model of a true monk, a true spiritual shepherd and a true teacher. The message of this monk in our times, is that, 'a true monk' will remain a monk irrespective of the changes in status. The only judges of its genuineness will be the ordinary people, not the favor-mongers around. The message of this true shepherd in our times, is that a true shepherd will always love to be with his own sheep, unmindful of the lures around. The message of this true teacher in our times, is that, a true teacher will address and even admonish the inner person of the disciple, unmindful of what 'profile' the disciple will create about the teacher. Mar Anthonios will continue to be the true role model and measuring rod for those who seek an ideal sage in our times.

"You are the most handsome of men; there is beauty in your words! You are blessed forever! (Psalm 45:2)

(Fr. Dr. Jacob Kurian, Professor Emeritus, Orthodox Theological Seminary, Kottayam is a well-known theologian)



Oommen Chandy: Hero Without Heroics

Prof. Jacob Kurian Onattu

Oommen Chandy (79), former Chief Minister of Kerala and the legislator with the longest innings in the Kerala Assembly, passed away in Bangalore on 18 July 2023 morning. Within a short time, his body was flown to Thiruvananthapuram and was offered for public viewing at the Durbar Hall and the KPCC office. The next morning (19th July), his funeral procession started from

the state capital to his native village Puthuppally. It was an unprecedented funeral procession which took more than 30 hours to cover a distance of 150 kms.

We have heard of the assassinated American President Abraham Lincoln's body having made a 1700 mile journey home with thousands of mourners offering tributes to their departed leader at every railway station. And in neighbouring Tamil Nadu, where tinsel heroes and heroines are worshipped as demi-gods, Annadurai, MGR and Jayalalithaa have had their funerals attended by millions. But Oommen Chandy's funeral procession and interment were so unique here in Kerala. No Keralite leader, political or religious, ever had such a grand tearful farewell attended by billowing crowds. For two to three days, the print and digital media had their entire focus on the departed leader's funeral procession and burial. In deference to the dead leader's wishes, his family had politely declined state honours at the funeral ceremony. But the funeral rites which extended to the late hours of the third day (20th July), drew many socio-political leaders, heads of religious denominations, top bureaucrats and of course tens of thousands of ordinary people. His Holiness Baselios Marthoma Mathews III, the Catholicos of the East, led the funeral service. His Eminence Cardinal Mar George Alencherry and several bishops, along with hundreds of priests, joined the obsequies. In a remarkable gesture, St. George Orthodox Valiyapally, Puthuppally, Oommen Chandy's home parish, constructed a special tomb for their beloved son on the eastern side of the altar, where usually only priests are buried. And surprisingly, to this day, hundreds of "devotees" visit his tomb every day, seeking the departed leader's prayers and blessings!

In Kerala, where the literacy rate is quite high and people are acclaimed for their knowledge and wisdom, they don't indulge in thoughtless hero-worship like in some neighbouring states. Keralites don't erect temples in honour of film stars, dead or alive. When ministers grow corrupt, they kick them out without mercy. Why then did they indulge in this 'deviant' behaviour towards Oommen Chandy? Why are people thronging his tomb and offering poems and supplications along with wreaths and bouquets even after his 40th day prayer service? Canonization, the declaration of the deceased person as an officially recognized saint, is somewhat rare in

Orthodox Churches. But already people are clamouring for Oommen Chandy's elevation to sainthood! What are the dead leader's sovereign qualities that raised him onto a pedestal which perhaps no other Malayalee can reach?

1. His Humility

Oommen Chandy adorned many covetable posts— Chief Minister, Opposition Leader, Home Minister, Finance Minister and Legislator with the longest uninterrupted tenure. He even became the AICC General Secretary. But these high offices didn't make him conceited.

He was ready to give up any office which didn't suit his principles. Every morning, even during his days as Chief Minister, people would go to his house with requests and petitions. He would attend to each and every visitor and do whatever possible to alleviate his/her misery. Personal comfort was not at all a concern for him. Much to everyone's amusement, it wasn't unusual

to see partymen and commoners taking a ride with him in his State Car. Often the car would be so packed leaving very little space for him, that he would have to squeeze himself in. Favour seekers would invade his bedroom and dining room, but he never objected. During his famous 'Jana Samparka' programmes (which won him the United Nations Award for Public Service in 2013), he would remain standing for 15-18 hours a day without lunch or tea break, to listen to people's grievances and offer redressal measures. Even while serving as Chief Minister, Oommen Chandy would attend Holy Qurbana at Puthuppally Church, standing casually amidst ordinary faithful and sitting down on the church floor during sermons and announcements, without even a hint of his high position. My brother, a



retired Superintending Engineer in Kerala Government Service once offered him a bike-ride when his car broke down on the way, and the Minister hopped on as the pillion rider, without waiting for the replacement car! He was down-to-earth, simple and compassionate to the core.

2. His Abiding Faith

Oommen Chandy was an ardent follower of the Orthodox faith. Every Sunday morning, he would attend Holy Qurbana at the Puthuppally Church before beginning his Sunday itinerary. Saint George (Puthuppally

Punyalan) was always his patron saint. His devotion to Pampady

Thirumeni, whose mortal remains are entombed at Pampady Dayara,

was also very special. Before launching any new initiative, Oommen Chandy would visit these holy churches with prayers and offerings. Even during his last few months in Bangalore while undergoing treatment for terminal illness, he attended the Good

Friday service at an Orthodox Church in the city. It was this abiding faith in God's benevolence that strengthened him while facing cooked-up allegations and mud-slinging. The infamous solar panel scam, Vizhinjam port allegation and the Palmolein oil import scam were all meant to tarnish his image. But investigations proved him to be absolutely innocent. He thanked God when the relevant verdicts came, but refused to adopt the line of revenge against his political enemies. Lincoln's famous policy "with malice towards none and charity for all" was his motto too.

3. Neutrality and Impartiality

Though he belonged to the Orthodox Christian Community, he never indulged in nepotism and favouritism.



He took many of his staff members from other communities without inducting his own kinsmen and neighbours. The split in the Malankara Orthodox Church saddened him very much. Many Orthodox die-hards (myself included) expected great favours for our church from him in his capacity as Chief Minister. But he was very neutral and objective. He didn't want to extend extra favours to any party. He knew the members of the dissident Jacobite faction are our own brothers and sisters. So he stood for a peaceful reconciliation between the two factions. This led to the Orthodox Church leadership doubting his loyalty. Once a protest march was organized from Puthuppally church to his residence in which thousands of Orthodox believers participated, shouting slogans. As Managing Committee member, it was my turn to bear the Church flag at the forefront of the protest rally. The Chief Minister was away at Trivandrum, but his staff would have passed on detailed information to him. He didn't show any bitterness or resentfulness when many of us approached him later. That was his true spirit.

There are many more remarkable traits in his character which raised him much above us lesser mortals. His humaneness, his compassion, his empathy for the poor and the downtrodden, his accessibility, self-abnegation and so on... space constraint does not allow me to go farther. Let me conclude with the words spoken by Edwin Stanton, US Secretary of War (Defence Minister) when he heard of Lincoln's assassination — "Now he belongs to the ages". The coming generations will definitely evaluate Oommen Chandy as a true Christian who passionately believed in Jesus Christ's dictum. "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (St. Matthew 25:45).

(Prof. Jacob Kurian Onattu, Retired Principal, Baselius College, Kottayam was a member of the Managing Committee (2002 – 2012) and Working Committee (2017 – 2022). He has also served as National Vice-President of All India Association for Christian Higher Education, New Delhi.)



Our Name is Our Identity, Handle it with Care

Fr. Anish Issac

‘And now thus says the Lord God who made you, O Jacob, and who formed you O Israel: ‘Fear not, for I redeemed you. I called you by your name, for you are mine’”
Isaiah 43:1

‘Your name is your identity, handle it with care.’ These words were quoted by Late Hollywood Actor Paul Walker on being questioned about the stardom he had attained through the series of his action movie *The Fast and The Furious*.

Names are our Identity. They define our personality. They speak to the world well before we are physically present at a particular place. Names give others a hint about us.

The Holy Scripture gives significant importance to names. The word Name and its inflected form occur nearly 1100 times in the Holy Bible, almost always translating the Hebrew (*s e m*) or the Greek (*Onamo*). Often a name is merely a literal mechanism for summoning someone. It is also used as a way to establish legal identity. But

in a wider sense, it also signifies the importance of a particular person/place; for e.g. God Knows Moses by name (Exodus: 33:17; 3:4); the good shepherd calls his own sheep by name (St. John 10:3). Name also defines a divine calling e.g. David (1 Sam 16:3), Isaiah (Is 49:1), the apostles (St. Lk 6:13).

In many places parents choose or construct a name that fits the circumstances of a child’s birth, Samuel (*heard by God* 1 Sam 1:20), Ichabod (*no glory* 1 Sam 4:21).

Ideally, however a name captures the essence of the person. In Genesis 2:19, Adam named the animals and, with it, had authority over them.

The Old Testament as such is the history of a group of people known as ‘wandering Arameans’, living without any identity, running around for food and shelter and not knowing whom to serve. It is this group of people that was chosen by the Almighty God, who gave his own name, made a covenantal relationship and proclaimed ‘*I will be your God and You will be my people for ever*’.

The prophet Isaiah prophesied to this group of people chosen by the Almighty God, who were blessed with riches and glory and asked them to just follow the righteous path and not doubt the path of the Lord. But this chosen group strayed away from the Law given to them, went after foreign Gods and offered sacrifices to them. Hence, as an act of correction they were sent into exile by the hands of the mighty Nebuchadnezzar.

The community to whom the prophet addressed was a community that had experienced a major disaster from which it still suffers. The motif of helplessness is constantly seen in the chosen passage. The prophet addresses the people with a message of hope; he promises early deliverance, and the restoration of Judah and Jerusalem. The period of composition of the literature of Isaiah begins with the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon. Not only Jerusalem, but most of the cities were brought down as an after effect of war. Many of them were neglected for generations and some were permanently abandoned. As a result of deportation and massive loss of life because of war, the population had significantly diminished. The situation was chaotic and the people were going through severe trauma as they were unable to understand what was happening.

Even when down in anxiety and depression, the Almighty God was strengthening the chosen race, encouraging them saying that the pain and the sufferings they faced were temporary and promising them the restoration of life and property.

The dominant theme of the passage is the mission of Israel. Israel is the servant and the witness of Yahweh. Because of YHWH people will run to Israel (55:5). YHWH has made Israel for his Glory (43:7). Through Israel his holiness would be manifested.

The names Jacob and Israel highlight YHWH's grace on an unworthy community and his great purpose for them. The usage of Jacob and Israel at the same time gives a direct significance of the great Exodus of Israel from Egypt. Both the names are of significant importance in the history of the Jewish community.

Jacob was the third in the patriarchal lineage and the second son of Isaac. The meaning of the name Jacob is 'to trip someone by seizing his heel/to supplant' (Gen

27:36). All through the life of Jacob till his encounter with the Angel of God, Jacob is seen as a person hiding his personality. When he stands in the presence of his father or at his father-in-law's house, Jacob is seen as an insecure person; but the grace of the Almighty God and the prayers and blessings of his mother are always with him.

Jacob, on his encounter with the Angel of God, is blessed as Israel i.e. *the messenger of God*. The whole story of the transition of Jacob to Israel is a story of survival based on gracious election, responsibility and discipline. All through the ups and downs this invisible grace is accompanying Israel.

The Holy Church is the new Israel. St. Peter in his first Epistle highlights 'You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, his own special people' (1 Peter 2:9a).

We the Christian community are the new Israel. Re-





deemed by the blood of the Son of God and sanctified by the Holy Victorious Cross, it is our sole responsibility to glorify his name and spread the word of God to all the quarters of the world.

Through the Holy Sacrament of Baptism we have received his name. Consecrated by the Holy Mooron, we are the temple of the Almighty God. The spirit of God dwells in us and it is our responsibility to glorify his name through our action, words and deeds.

In the world which we live, Religion and Relations are taken for granted. The secular and liberal ideologies of the world are trying to redefine the historicity of the Christian Community. Jesus Christ is defined as just another God or just as a prophet.

But it should be our strong faith and affirmation that Jesus Christ is the saviour of the world. Beliefs and faith affirmations may be misinterpreted as Fanaticism or Extremism. There are many instances in our country today, when for temporal gain, Religion, which is a tool of Harmony, is redefined as a weapon of Hegemony. It was only through love that Jesus Christ incarnated himself into this world and it was only through love that he gave his life for us.

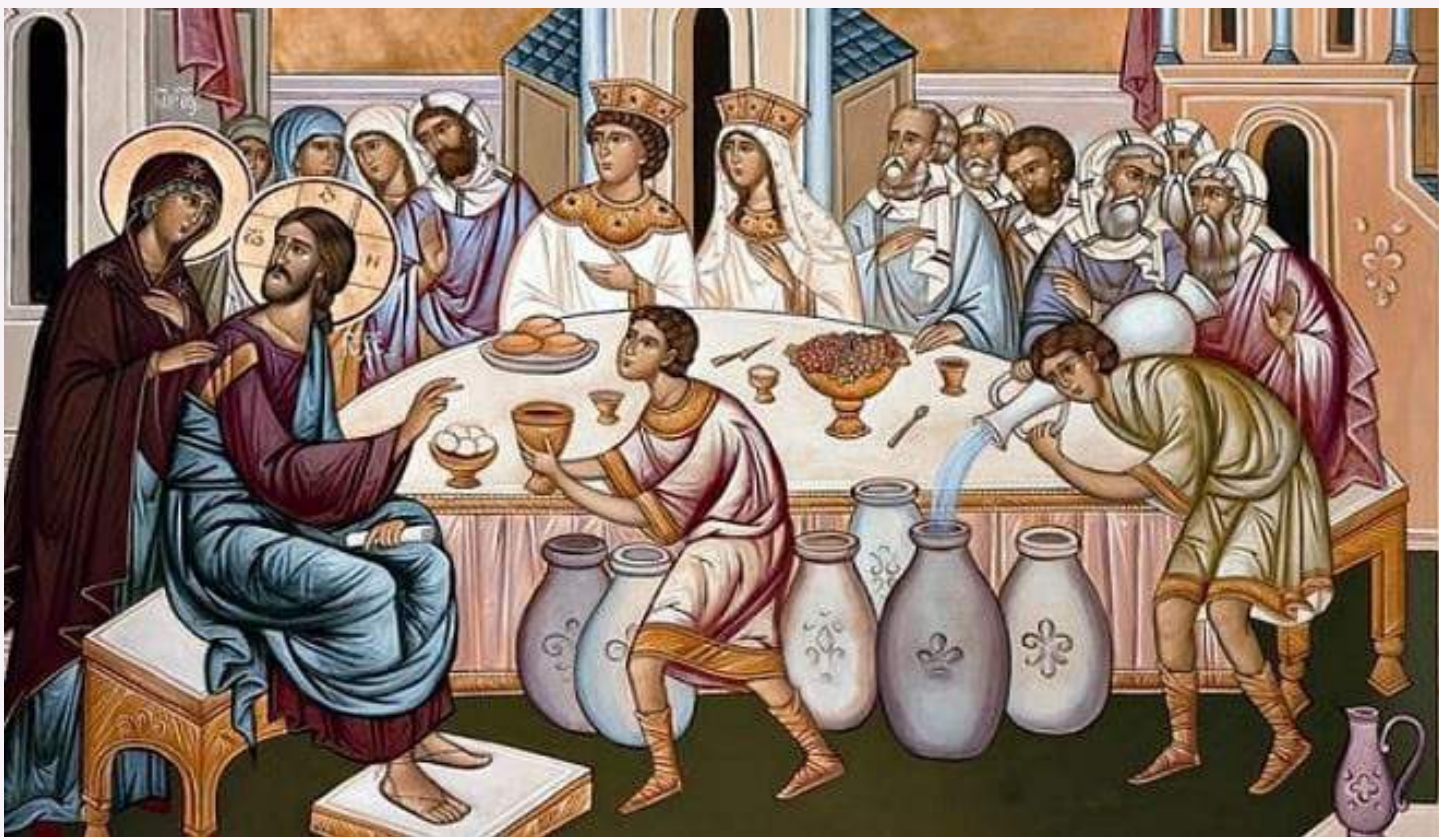
Prophet Isaiah through his prophecy (Is 43:1) describes this love of YHWH to the Israelites in Exile. He

told them that they should not be discouraged by the temporal distractions and problems they were facing during the Exile, but to be spirited through faith and move forward. The history of Israel during the Exile teaches us that the grace of the Almighty will always be with us. Temporal hurdles and problems are prominent in life because they open new opportunities and directions.

Though temple worship ended completely with the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, gradually Synagogue worship emerged among the Jewish community. The Jews who were centred at Jerusalem spread to various quarters of the world. Literature and philosophy were formed and developed and though the community had spread apart they had the common zeal and enthusiasm to affirm that they were the chosen race of the Almighty.

Isaiah 43:1 teaches us that problems are unavoidable in life. When going through rough patches just remember the abundant grace showered upon us. Look back and thank God for all that we have achieved. Repent for all the unworthy deeds and move forward in his grace and always remember 'Our Name Is Our Identity, Handle it with Care'.

(Fr. Anish Issac is a faculty member of the Orthodox Theological Seminary, Kottayam)



VIRGIN MARY, MOTHER OF GOD: MARY MOTHER OF THE CHURCH PART II

Dr. Yuhanon Mar Diascoros

This is the second part of the Article on Virgin Mary, Mother of God, written by H G Yuhanon Mar Diascoros, featured in the July to September edition of the Malankara Sabha English Quarterly. Part I dealt with the exalted position attributed to the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Malankara Orthodox Church, a glimpse of her life story, followed by a brief discussion on some of the misconceptions and questions regarding her divinity and her being declared ‘Ever Virgin’.

Part II continues the discussion on controversies regarding a ‘coming together’ of Joseph and Mary ‘after the birth of Jesus Christ’ and the mention of ‘brothers and sisters’ of Jesus Christ in the Bible. We start with the debate to counter the theory that Virgin Mary and Joseph were celibate up to the birth of Jesus Christ and after that lived a normal family life

1. “Up to – After”

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 1:18 NRSV). Protestants claim that the words before they came together imply that Joseph and Mary came together later. They further argue that the words ‘He did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son, (Matthew 1:25 NKJV) mean that they had marital relations after the child was born.

Counter point: Here, the Evangelist actually intends to convey another matter of utmost importance, which is, that the Blessed Virgin Mary, without being in relationship with any man, carried the child Jesus in her womb and gave birth to him. There are two reasons that support this concept.

a) The birth of Christ is unique and different from all others. That Virgin Mary conceived and carried Christ in her womb, without being in relationship with any man, reveals her Godliness, *‘for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.* (Matthew 1:20)

b) The birth of Christ, the Lord, is without sin. The sinless one took birth as a human being for us sinners, died on the cross and saved us. His birth from Virgin Mary who had no relationship with any man, teaches us in no uncertain terms, that he is sinless. Through these verses, the evangelist was actually pointing out the sinless incarnation of the Lord.

The phrases *before they came together* and *up to the birth* can be considered as merely routine expressions. Some examples: 2 Samuel 6:23 says that Saul’s sister Michal had no children till her death. Does it mean that she had children after her death? In Matthew 28:26 Christ says that He will be with us always, till the end of the world. Does it mean that He ceases to exist after the world ends?

Therefore, just because the words “up to” the time she gave birth were used, the interpretation that they came together after that, cannot be given. Moreover, would Joseph who had witnessed and experienced the profound and divine miracles, be willing to have an ordinary relationship with such a holy person. Weren’t the proclamations of

the Angels, the extraordinary incidents that occurred at the time of the birth of Jesus Christ, the visit of the Magi and the shepherds, and Joseph’s own visions and messages from God, significant enough for him?

2. The brothers of Jesus Christ

A few Protestants believe that the brothers of Jesus Christ were born of Virgin Mary. (Matthew 12: 46, 13:54-56, Mark 3:32-33, Acts: 1:14, Galatians 1:18-19)

Counter point: In the Hebrew tradition the term ‘Brothers’ would include close relatives also. A few examples are: Genesis 29: 10-12. When Jacob saw Rachel with his maternal Uncle Laban’s flock, he went to the well, rolled the stone away and watered the sheep. He introduced himself to Rachel, saying that he was her father’s (Laban’s) brother, and the son of Rebecca. Here it is seen that Jacob refers to his mother’s brother as his own brother. In Genesis 29:15, we see that Laban addresses his sister’s son (nephew) as brother.

Lot was the son of Haran, Abraham’s brother. (Genesis 11:31). However, in Genesis 14:14 we read that ‘When Abraham heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained servants, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them unto Dan’. Even though Lot is his nephew, Abraham refers to him as his brother to indicate close relationship.



3. Who are the brothers of Christ

Christ went to his father's city and preached in the Temples there. The people there were astonished and asked 'Where did he get this wisdom that such mighty works are performed by him! Isn't he the carpenter's son? Aren't James, Joses, Judas, and Simon his brothers? And are not His sisters here with us?' (Matthew 13: 55-56, Mark 6:1-3).

It is said that Apostle Paul saw James, the brother of Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:19). He was called James the younger, to differentiate him from James, the son of Zebedee (Mark 15: 40). The same person is referred to as James, the son of Alpheus (Matthew 10:3). He was an Apostle. (Gal 1:19).

Counter point: The Gospel of St. Matthew says that at the time of crucifixion, "*Many women from Galilee who were helping Jesus and were his followers were standing there looking on from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary his mother, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.*" (Matthew 27:55-56).

Mary, the mother of James and Joses, was married to Cleopas. '*There stood by the cross of Jesus, his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleopas and Mary Magdalene*' (John 19:25). *Mary the mother of James and Joses and Mary Magdalene stood at the foot of the cross.* (Matthew 27:55-56). These were the same women who went to the tomb of Jesus carrying spices to anoint the body of Jesus. '*After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.*' (Matthew 28:1)

So it is seen that those who have been referred to as the 'brothers of Jesus' are actually his close relatives. Instead of focusing only on the phrase 'brothers of Jesus', Protestants are encouraged to examine the nature of the relationship mentioned, based on Biblical contexts.

Church Fathers St. Ephrem, and St. Epiphanius are of the view that Christ's brothers may be the sons of Joseph, from his first marriage. Though this is not applicable to all those who have been said to be brothers of Jesus, it might apply to a few. However the Bible makes it very clear, that Mary had no other son, but Jesus. From the cross Jesus entrusts his beloved disciple John to his mother and, entrusts his mother in John's care. '*When Jesus saw*

The Church has declared Mary "Ever Virgin" based on the miracles related to the birth of Jesus Christ.

his mother at the foot of the cross, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son" and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.' (John 19:26-27). It can be logically concluded that if there were other children Jesus need not have entrusted Virgin Mary to John. (John 19: 26-27).

Conclusion

In short, the Church has declared Mary "Ever Virgin" based on the miracles related to the birth of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is God. *Virgin Mary's womb is the throne which God graced. If anybody else sits on that throne it would destroy the supreme divinity of the Lord,* says St. Ephrem. In the words of the Prophet Ezekiel: *The gate on the East side of the Temple area was closed, and the Lord said to me, "This gate will stay closed and will never be opened. No human being is allowed to use it, because I, the Lord God of Israel have entered through it. It is to remain closed"* (Ezekiel 44:2). This temple is the womb of Virgin Mary, in which God descended and dwelled as the Incarnated Word. Nobody else is worthy of entering through these gates.

During the last two months we have celebrated the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary and her Dormition and Assumption to heaven. We have had a blessed time of lent and prayers that added to our devotion and veneration of the Mother of God. As the Mother of the Church, let us turn to her for intercessions to her Son for peace in our church and our country.

(H.G. Dr. Yuhanon Mar Diascoros, President, Malankara Sabha, is serving as Metropolitan of Kottayam Diocese. This article is an excerpt from his book 'Melezhuth', on Orthodox Tradition and Spirituality.)



GARDEN OF EDEN 2.0: THE AI ENABLED APPLE

Dr. Susan Elias & ChatGPT

I asked ChatGPT, ‘*What advice can I give to Christian youth today?*’

And the reply was – ‘*Guiding Christian youth is a meaningful endeavour. Here are some pieces of advice you could consider sharing with them.*’ A comprehensive framework for this article was put forth by ChatGPT and I augmented it with my views from three decades of my experience as a Professor. This article is intended for the Youth of the Orthodox Church and their well-wishers!

Dear Children, during childhood you were all encapsulated in secure environments under the watchful eyes of your parents. In addition to your friends, classmates and teachers at school, you were introduced to our Orthodox Christian community at church through Sunday school, and probably a few other social groups that your parents were connected with in the neighbourhood. These were associations that were in place to give you an ecosystem to groom into a well-rounded personality. Eventually as you move into college and subsequently a career, you will be faced with numerous challenges as you navigate through the big bad world outside.

Although entering college is a big step away from the guided childhood environment, it still is a protected phase of your life. Ideally when you cross 18, you have more freedom to explore the world outside. But your freedom ends where the law of the land or rules of the institution begins. Institutions impose stringent punishments such as expulsion, suspension, fine, etc. for

examination malpractice, breaking rules, ragging, violence and cyberbullying to name a few. But the intentions are to correct the students, not to punish them. During enquiry by disciplinary committees, it has been found that most often innocent and vulnerable students are trapped by their friends whom they trust. Friends can either be a negative or positive influence and hence it is important to associate with like-minded students, who are ambitious and are involved in sports, arts, music or co-curricular activities besides academics. Decades ago the major menaces on college campuses were consumption of alcohol, smoking and drug addiction; but with a good vigilance system on campuses, these are currently monitored and controlled. In some campuses drones are used for surveillance of outdoor spaces and CCTV cameras for indoor spaces.

The biggest problem we face on university campuses today is *social media addiction*. An even worse manifestation is the *gaming addiction*. These activities are hard to detect and track. I have had many students who were hard core gaming addicts. Gaming had ruined their academic progress and had caused severe health issues both mental and physical. Many brilliant students have become victims of gaming addiction and in my experience gaming has done more harm to our youth than drug abuse. Depression and suicidal thoughts further hamper the career growth of our youth, because, based on the impact, it can create a major setback and delay the

process of settling down in a career. College days are a great learning experience, as it prepares you with life skills that will stay with you forever. It is important to listen to advice from your well-wishers both in spiritual and real life experiences. This will help you adapt yourselves soon to the new environment and be productive as students.

Christians in general, are expected to Pray, Preach and Practice Christianity and based on this we can identify eight variants of Christians amongst us. Some of these variants include - those who *only pray* and don't preach or practice, those who *only preach* and don't pray or practice, those who *only practice* and don't pray or preach and so on..! At different stages of our lives we adopt one of these variants as our way of life, by choice or circumstances, or by peer pressure.

The Malankara Orthodox Liturgy has a well-defined structure and format for prayers. The transliteration in English and other regional languages, as well as the access to Digital copies and YouTube videos online, has made 'learning to pray' easier than it ever was for children of the Malankara Orthodox Church. However, there are very limited opportunities for a member to preach (deliver a sermon), in the Orthodox Church system, because, besides priests and bishops, only designated people are officially permitted to preach. However, there are several videos, texts and audio content available on the internet from Orthodox and non-Orthodox sources that create a lot of knowledge and confusion as well, because fundamental beliefs are questioned by other Christian denominations. Preaching helps to promote Christianity but with so many Christian denominations having contradictory views and conflicting ideas, it is a big challenge for our youth to address them for their own understanding or at forums open to such discussions in peer groups.

Globally, religion is becoming more of a business and professional marketing strategies are being adopted to lure followers. The victims are largely youth from traditional and mainline churches such as the Malankara Orthodox Church. Though our youth do not want to go away from Orthodox faith, many of you are drawn away by sermons you hear on the internet and click - subscribe, like & follow! The leaders of our Church have to make note of this and come up with a strategy to digitally reach out to

the youth, talk to them and genuinely help them at this critical phase and turning point in their lives. Ideally, each young person must have a priest or a bishop whom you can refer to as one of your best friends! This will help you to stay grounded in the Orthodox faith and Christian values. However, practising Christianity by being a true Christian at work is the biggest challenge that you will face as you move into your career tracks in the big bad corporate world.

Honestly there are hardly any role models in today's world who practice what they preach! Youngsters get carried away by fake personalities and fake views posted in social media. Social media content is what the youth of today are exposed to as they transform into adults. This is when you move away from the ideologies of the family and community. You have the freedom and access to everything around, without realizing that there are more bad influencers than good. At work you will be exposed to unethical business practices and dishonesty everywhere. This is when your fundamental Christian values are put to test. Until this point parents and teachers were your guardian angels though they may have seemed hostile and strict in many aspects to you.

The first few years at work is the most turbulent, as everyone around will want to put you down and climb over your failures. It is the most stressful phase, as you might not be able to hold on to your Christian values at work. So how does one deal with this? Meanwhile, peer pressure, targets to achieve at work, performance based incentives and more will make life a bigger burden than you can handle. Alongside this turbulent time at work, on the personal front you will be expected to commit to married life and take up family responsibilities. The stress is now doubled, leading to disharmony and crisis in both personal and professional life.

This is the time when youth need help and guidance. Prayers and sermons should help them overcome stress and deal with the challenges they face at this stage of their lives. This is the reason why many of our youth are not willing to get married as they want to settle down in their careers and then deal with marriage. They do not want to deal with both simultaneously. Gen Z has a very different thought process and it is better to align with it and help them fine-tune it rather than radically change

them and their views.

Garden of Eden 2.0 and the AI Enabled Apple

The recent COVID epidemic helped in achieving the goals of Digital India. We all learnt how to pray, preach and practice Christian values online. However, this digital world governed by social media is the Garden of Eden 2.0 with AI driving the Apples of the IT industry. We are all in a trap lured by the sheer expanse and endless possibilities of the digital world. There are digital twins being created for each one of us by the AI in the background. Whatever we post, like, share or comment online is saved in the cloud (servers) forever. In the pre-digital world we could confess our sins and move on, but now we live in a world where nothing is forgotten. This leads to a personality crisis and depression that can further ruin family life and beyond. We cannot ask our youth to stay away from social media as it is important for career growth and for social associations. What do we do and how do we help our youth in overcoming this phase of their lives?

Responsibility as a Community

Primarily, youth aspire to attain financial independence through a stable career. We as a community can come together and guide them through a forum that could help accelerate their professional journey. This will give them the confidence to face all other challenges as they stay focused and be productive citizens of our country. It is heartening to see thousands of youth from Kerala migrating to US, Europe and Canada. Will leaving India solve their problems?

We have to empower our youth with the ‘power of prayer’. We should prepare them with a strong spiritual foundation that will help them overcome the burdens of this difficult phase of their lives. Prayer should be their strength and comfort in times of need. As a community we should not only reach out to them and help them but we should also pray for our youth to enable them to take their professional and personal lives forward with Jesus Christ as their Godfather!

At Vellore Institute of Technology where I work currently, I have the opportunity to compare the youth from Kerala with their peers from every other state of our country. Decades ago, students from Kerala were outstanding in every aspect, with innovative and creative

ideas, exceptional organizing skills and good in sports and extracurricular activities. But today I find a sharp decline in the overall personality of Malayali youth. They lack confidence and are not as ambitious as students from Gujarat, Punjab, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and even the North-East regions. Ever since I noticed this change I have been keenly observing students from Kerala, trying to understand what the underlying problem could be.

We need to motivate our youth and make sure they are on par with the best in the country. We need to act now! We need to create an ecosystem to help them stand-out once again during their college days as well as in their careers. We can start at our church and it’s related activities. Today I had attended a traditional Orthodox Prayer meeting. For the past 50 years the format of this prayer meeting has not changed. As a community we need to think out-of-the-box and involve our children in the process of making the necessary changes in our systems to stay relevant. We need to use a data driven approach to policy making in our churches and have a very special focus on the youth of our church. The youth are the most vulnerable and we need to hand-hold them, pray for them and make them the best in the Country!

Dear Children, I would like to conclude by highlighting a quote that I follow diligently to stay progressive - “Great minds discuss ideas; average minds discuss events; small minds discuss people” - Eleanor Roosevelt. Spend your time wisely, as the best way to predict your future is to create it!

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Biblical Financial Stewardship: Weaving Wisdom and Wealth

Fr. Vineeth M Koshy

In the vast tapestry of ancient wisdom and spiritual guidance that is in the Bible, a profound theme resonates through its pages—the concept of financial stewardship. The introduction to biblical financial stewardship unveils a paradigm wherein humanity’s relationship with material wealth is seen as a sacred trust bestowed by the Divine. Ranging from the *Parable of Talents* to the *Lessons of Generosity* displayed by biblical figures, we find teachings that emphasize the prudent management of resources, the importance of giving, and the profound connection between one’s spiritual life and how one handles financial matters. As we delve into the timeless wisdom of biblical financial stewardship, we are beckoned to reconsider our attitudes toward wealth, material possessions and the transformative potential of embracing a life dedicated to earthly prudence and heavenly pursuits.

Foundations of Stewardship:

Recognizing Divine Ownership

At the heart of the biblical concept of financial stewardship lies a transformative shift in perspective: the recognition that we are stewards, not owners, of the resources entrusted to us. This profound insight, woven throughout the scriptures, challenges the prevailing notion

of possession and reframes our relationship with wealth in a sacred light. The book of Psalms reminds us, “*The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it*” (Psalm 24:1, NIV). This declaration establishes the foundation upon which the principle of stewardship is built—acknowledging that all we have comes from God’s benevolent providence.

The concept of stewardship, not ownership, challenges us to see our possessions as tools for serving God and our fellow human beings. It invites us to cultivate an attitude of gratitude, recognizing that all we have is a gift entrusted to us by the Divine. This shift transforms financial decisions into acts of worship, inviting us to manage our resources with wisdom, compassion and an eternal perspective. Thus, the narrative of stewardship emerges as a call to embrace a higher purpose in our financial choices, recognizing that in faithfully managing what we have been given, we participate in the unfolding story of God’s provision and grace.

Balanced Perspective on Money:

Blessing and Potential Pitfall

The Bible shows that financial provision is a sign of God’s care for His people. In the context of the Isra-



elites' journey through the wilderness, God provided manna to sustain them. However, when they entered the Promised Land, the manna ceased, and they were encouraged to cultivate the land for sustenance (Joshua 5:12). This shift signifies God's intention for His people to actively engage in productive work and stewardship of resources, actively fostering a positive relationship with money through diligence and responsible management. The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) also offers a glimpse into God's positive perspective on generosity and financial assistance. The Samaritan's compassionate care for the injured traveller exemplifies the importance of using one's resources to help those in need, demonstrating that money can be a tool for expressing love, compassion, and service.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus Christ cautions against storing treasures on earth and encourages seeking heavenly treasures instead: *“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. However, store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal”* (Matthew 6:19-20, NIV). This admonition underscores the impermanence of material wealth and the need to focus on eternal values. The biblical narrative reminds believers that wealth can be a blessing when used responsibly and generously, but it can also become a stumbling block when pursued for its own sake. The warnings conveyed in scripture prompt individuals to examine their hearts, motivations, and priorities, ensuring that their pursuit of financial well-being remains rooted in humility, contentment and a deep commitment to God's kingdom.

In essence, the concept of how God thinks positively about money within biblical financial stewardship is grounded in the understanding that wealth, when approached with wisdom, humility, and a heart inclined toward righteous values, can be a channel for blessing, provision, and a means to fulfil God's purposes on earth. This narrative encourages believers to embrace a balanced perspective on money that recognizes its potential for

good while remaining vigilant against its potential to lead astray.

The Parable of the Talents:

A Lesson in Financial Prudence and Stewardship

The Parable of the Talents, as recounted in the Gospel of Matthew 25:14-30, unfolds as a profound allegory imbued with timeless wisdom on the Biblical Understanding of Financial Prudence, Stewardship and Discipline. The Parable of the Talents transcends time, resonating



profoundly with the aspirations and dilemmas of the modern young generation. As they navigate a world rich with opportunities and choices, they are beckoned to adopt the mindset of stewards—individuals who think differently than owners. Embracing this transformative perspective leads to a life of purpose, impact, and meaningful fulfilment, aligning with the parable's eternal truths and shedding light on the age-old dichotomy between ownership and stewardship.

The modern young generation is invited to embrace the mindset of stewards, catalyzed by the parable's insights. Stewards think differently than owners. They view resources as instruments to be multiplied, talents to be developed, and opportunities to be seized. Stewards recognize the transient nature of material possessions and prioritize investing in eternal values, relationships, and personal growth. This transformative perspective informs decisions about education, career, finances and the use of technology. It fosters a proactive approach to addressing societal challenges and channelling resources toward meaningful causes.

The parable invites the modern young generation to realize that work is a gift intricately woven into the fabric

of human existence. It involves transcending the utilitarian perspective of work merely as a means to financial ends and embracing a holistic outlook while overcoming the temptations of workaholism. The parable resonates deeply with the modern young generation, inviting them to step into the role of stewards who recognize work as a gift. This perspective shifts the work paradigm from mere toil to a realm of purposeful engagement, fulfilment, and impact. By embracing the ethos of stewardship, work professionalism and understanding the profound truth that work is a gift entrusted to them, modern youth can embark on a transformative journey that not only shapes their careers but also contributes to society.

Recognition of Abundance: The first step towards financial contentment is acknowledging the abundance bestowed upon us. The parable emphasizes that even a single talent is a valuable endowment. In the context of the modern generation, recognizing the resources at hand, no matter how modest forms the foundation of contentment.

Growth through Diligence: The parable's commendation of the servants who multiplied their talents elucidates the importance of responsible and diligent management. Modern youth can harness this principle by approaching their financial journey with wisdom, seeking growth through informed decisions, savings, and investments.

Comparison and Envy: The parable's third servant, who buried his talent, embodies the corrosive effects of comparison and envy. In modern times, the rise of social media has amplified these tendencies, making it easy for individuals to measure their worth against others. The ensuing discontentment stems from an insidious desire to "have what others have." The parable cautions against the pitfalls of comparison and redirects focus towards gratitude for one's unique resources.

Fear of Risk: The third servant's inaction originates from a place of fear—fear of failure, fear of losing what he was entrusted with. This resonates with the aversion to financial risks in the contemporary landscape, often stemming from a scarcity mindset. The parable nudges the modern youth to discern the fine line between prudence and stagnation, inviting them to pursue growth and purpose beyond their comfort zones.

Materialism and Short-Term Gratification: The parable

underscores the fleeting nature of wealth. The servant who suppressed his talent represents those ensnared by materialism and short-term gratification. The modern generation, amidst consumer culture and instant gratification, often seeks fulfilment in short-term satisfactions. The narrative prompts introspection on whether such acquisitions genuinely lead to lasting contentment.

Lack of Purpose: The parable's pathos lies in the contrast between the first two servants, who multiplied their talents, and the third, who did not. This disparity mirrors the modern generation's quest for purpose—whether in careers, finances, or life pursuits. Discontentment often arises when endeavours lack meaningful direction. The parable implores a shift towards purpose-driven financial stewardship.

Recognizing the Trust: The master's entrustment of talents reflects the trust bestowed upon individuals. In the modern context, teenagers' high salary packages include allowances, part-time job earnings, or gifts - a representation of their talents. This prompts a reflective pause: What will they do with these resources? The parable invites them to recognize that these resources are not solely theirs; they are stewards, called to manage them wisely.

Shared Stewardship: Just as the servants were entrusted with talents, youth are entrusted with the stewardship of shared resources. The parable reminds them that these resources are not individually owned but are a shared responsibility. A foundation of trust and open communication is vital, reflecting biblical principles of unity and shared purpose.

Balancing Differences: The parable depicts servants with varying talents in contrast to the diverse financial backgrounds and perspectives of couples. Financial accountability requires understanding each other's financial history, values, and goals. The narrative urges couples to find common ground, recognizing that their differing talents contribute to a holistic partnership.

Multiplying Resources: The parable commends those who multiplied their talents. This echoes in the financial realm of youth, who are called to make wise financial decisions that lead to growth, stability, and mutual prosperity. The narrative encourages youngsters to actively engage in financial planning and investment, aligned

with shared goals.

Multiplying Impact through Compassion: The parable commends the servants who multiplied their talents. This principle extends to the modern young generation's pursuit of multiplying impact through charitable acts. They can channel their resources - toward initiatives that take care of their elderly parents, alleviate suffering, provide education, and uplift the marginalized, thereby creating a ripple effect of positive change.

Discipline of Frugality: Like skilled artisans, those who embrace frugality, carefully choose where to allocate their resources, nurturing a mindset that values careful spending over impulsive consumption. A sturdy foundation for financial stability is laid with each penny saved and each unnecessary expense avoided. This conscious restraint fosters a deeper appreciation for what is essential, cultivating a life where needs are met without compromising future aspirations. As the years unfurl, the cumulative impact of these deliberate choices becomes evident as savings gather momentum and investments grow steadily. The discipline of frugality empowers individuals to take control of their financial destinies, enabling them to weather unforeseen storms and seize unexpected opportunities. The narrative of frugality leading to financial freedom is one of patience, resilience, and foresight, culminating in a life where choices are abundant, worries are subdued, and the path ahead is paved with the brilliance of possibility.

Pathways of Financial Choice and Consequence

In financial choices, similar to spiritual choices, we find ourselves at the crossroads defined by three distinct paths. Just as in matters of faith, these financial choices have consequences beyond the immediate material realm.

The first path, *living above our means*, can be likened to chasing after worldly desires without heed to their cost. It is a pursuit driven by instant gratification, where material possessions and appearances precede fiscal responsibility. Much like the allure of temptations, this lifestyle often leads to accumulating debt – a burden that mirrors the spiritual weight of sin. The stress from the struggle to meet financial obligations parallels the turmoil experienced when we distance ourselves from a balanced spiritual life.

The second path, *living within our means*, reflects a sense of moderation and self-discipline. Just as in mindful

living, this financial approach advocates for embracing what is essential and avoiding excess. By adhering to a budget and maintaining a steady, balanced cash flow, we achieve a financial equilibrium akin to the spiritual peace of leading a virtuous life. This choice liberates us from debt and empowers us to make thoughtful decisions.

The third path, *living below our means*, holds a more profound significance, much like the spiritual commitment to humility and detachment. It transcends the common pursuit of mere stability and freedom from debt, inviting us to a realm of self-control that parallels the restraint exercised in spiritual practices. By consciously living below our financial capacity, we gain financial freedom and the capacity to give generously and assist those in need – mirroring the compassion and generosity preached in Christ's teachings.

Legacy of Stewardship: Custodianship for Future Generations

Financial discipline, prudent spending, suitable investments, and Christian stewardship of wealth form the cornerstone of a holistic approach to managing resources. Like skilled conductors, youngsters must wield the baton of discipline to orchestrate harmonious rhythms of spending and saving, conducting a symphony that resonates with balance and foresight. Through the lens of stewardship, youngsters must embrace their roles as custodians, nurturing resources not merely for themselves but for the legacy they sculpt for generations to come. As they venture into the realm of investments, they embark on a voyage guided by astute discernment, navigating the seas of risk and reward. Just as an artist layers colours to evoke depth, they must layer their financial decisions with knowledge and prudence, yielding a canvas that portrays both their aspirations and the canvas of reality.

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Manipur: A distant cry in search of justice and understanding

Fr. Thomas Ninan

It has been three months since the ethnic violence broke out in the state of Manipur, and the authorities are still looking for answers to find a way to bring the ongoing violence to rest. Every day brings new stories of either atrocities committed on common man, or a clash between two communities or with the security personnel. Several shades of vested interests, of drug cartels protecting their long term interests in the region, of protecting the interests of larger powers in the mining of platinum and oil resources discovered in the hills, or of certain religious groups trying to raise their concern for their rights, are being witnessed amidst all the unrest in Manipur. As the situation unfolds day by day, one thing is definite, no narrative can portray or bring out an exhaustive and wholesome truth about the range of issues that Manipur is facing today. At best they can only be a part of the truth. They will be interconnected and definitely, many aspects of the truth will be withheld, for reasons best known to them. As a person who had the opportunity to have several years of association with the people of Manipur, in little ways, and more so these days, when as part of the Christian Service Agency in Nagpur, I have the responsibility to handle the relief work among the Internally Displaced People in Manipur and around the neighbouring states of Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Mizoram, my objective through this article is to share some experiences, which I hope will help relate and respond to the situation, more realistically. The Christian Service Agency, which is the diaconal wing of the National Council of Churches in India, was given the prime responsibility to undertake relief work in Manipur and to wherever possible among the displaced communities in other parts of the North East, since the unrest started in May 2023.

AN EXPERIENTIAL BACKGROUND

Several years back (from 2003 to 2006), as a staff of the Christian Medical Association of India (CMAI) in Delhi, and Programme Coordinator for the Programme to Combat Substance Abuse in the Community Health

Department of CMAI, I was coordinating awareness and training programs related to substance abuse issues, engaging churches, NGOs involved in addressing substance abuse and those affected by the same in different parts of the country. Among the different places I have been, I observed that the programs in the North East India region were the most effective, as the churches realistically related to it and came up with relevant ways to address it in their region. Almost every family would be directly affected by the problem of substance abuse with someone or the other, being part of it. Stigma related to it also would be the highest in the NE, when compared to other places, as the largely Christian society in the North East, considered those who consume substances (alcohol, drugs, chewing tobacco etc) to be grave sinners. Not much has changed in the NE from those days, in spite of the several efforts taken to address those issues, in terms of reducing stigma, and coming up with a concerted effort to address the problem of substance abuse, especially drug abuse and chewing tobacco, which looms large even today, in several parts of the NE region. The North Eastern states, especially those bordering Myanmar (Manipur, Nagaland and Mizoram) would be the most affected by the Golden Triangle, which has its geographical limits covering the borders of China, Thailand, Laos, and Myanmar that meet at the confluence of the Ruak and the Mekong Rivers. The Golden Triangle is one of the two regions in Asia involved in the cultivation of opium and engaged in illicit drug trade for decades now. Coined by the CIA, the Golden Triangle covers an area of approximately 950,000 square kilometres (367,000 sq mi) that overlaps the mountains of the four adjacent countries. In a region such as North East India, where very little of the government development initiatives have reached since independence, when compared to the other states, it was an obvious reality that this region would be affected the most by the Golden Triangle, giving jobs to many youngsters in the form of drug peddling, who consequently become addicted to the same.

My visits to Manipur during those days, along with other parts of the NE region, particularly to Imphal and Churachandpur, would involve visits to various Drug Rehabilitation Centers in this region, besides engaging the churches there for several training programs on addressing drug abuse. I remember from those days, the challenges involved in traveling from the airport in Imphal to Churachandpur, which is about 60 kms, covering various villages in between. The scenes of Army patrolling on this route was a regular feature even then, whereby, tensions between various ethnic communities in the valley were prevalent from time to time. Not in my wildest dreams could I imagine having to see such days as today, with the large-scale violence that has affected the whole region, displacing so many people from their own villages and so many lives lost from these villages.

RESPONDING TO THE CRISIS – THE QUESTION OF ‘WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY’?

To me, the most annoying images then and now, would be the lack of development that has happened in the State and the lack of responsibility from the country towards such a state as Manipur, to resolve the historical ethnic tensions and help them move on with their lives towards prosperity. The insensitivity, heartlessness and a lack of responsibility towards the North East, was a larger question that would linger in my mind from those days... and mind you, it was another ruling party at the helm in those days. So today, when the present day ruling party is on a defensive mode with respect to Manipur, trying to move the ball of responsibility to their predecessors, I for one can confidently say, “I hear you, I understand what you are trying to say.” That in no way, is an excuse, to shying away from their present-day responsibility of taking care of Manipur... “today, whether you like it or not, you are the ruling party and you are solely responsible for the reasons and the consequences of what has happened in Manipur TODAY”. Having said that, the whole country cannot shy away from its moral responsibility as well, in taking the blame of not having done enough for Manipur and the North East. The extent of human rights violations that has happened in Manipur has indeed put the whole country to shame, making one wonder that as a nation, the nurturing and sharing of values as a country

did not happen with Manipur, as it should have, and now it is only obvious to have an aching heart as a nation to see Manipur go through all that it has to. As a citizen, I feel sorry to put you in this state...women, children, the elderly on the streets, running for life and shelter...

It is with such a sense of guilt and responsibility, as a citizen, as a parent, as a brother, as a neighbour, and as a servant of God, I strive to engage in finding ways to reach out to Manipur, to provide relief to as many as possible. Through the three months of their suffering, I have realized how limited is my reach and how inadequate the resources available. Day after day, I longed to hear from this church leader I knew and that church I knew, I longed to hear from the many I thought would respond to such a catastrophe opening up before our eyes. While Manipur burnt, I realized that there are priorities that each of us have to attend to as well, as individuals, as churches, as organizations. But it pained to see the hesitancy from many, many in power, many as organizations who could have responded, who were more worried about saving their own skin, and choosing not to get caught up by the present dispensation. I can only pity them, as tomorrow their own conscience will ask them, “what did you do?”

THE RELIEF EFFORTS SO FAR...

But there came the manna from heaven, as God inspired those chosen few, angels I must say, who responded to our calls, and those who voluntarily responded and sent support. They say, charity begins at home and I must proudly share here that when I first shared this at home, it was my father who was one of the first to contribute for Manipur relief. Like that, I am indebted to all those who responded, at times without asking, to ensure that our relief work reached the most needy in different parts of Manipur. The Christian Service Agency, reached out to individuals, organizations and churches in its network, to support the relief efforts through the past three months. By God’s grace, we have been able to raise around 30 lakhs through contributions and around 50 lakhs through direct support to the needy. A significant effort of supplying dry ration, mattresses, mosquito nets and other essential items to different parts of Manipur could be achieved, without the presence of a single staff of CSA in Manipur, thanks to the collective effort taken by different people

who came by in each of the places of the relief work. To me, those voluntary efforts by my fellow citizens stand out as a telling witnesses to the country, in the time of crisis. They are the unsung heroes in my story, for whom, no words of praise are sufficient.

The CSA's first response was in the form of supplying essential dry ration to about 1000 people in relief camps in Imphal East and to about 4000 people in Kangpokpi District, just one week after the violence broke out in the month of May. In Imphal East, we relied on the vendor and our volunteers from the AMANA (All Manipur Nupi Manbi Association), an association of the Transgender community in Manipur, who had engaged in relief work during COVID in the same place. We relied on the exemplary efforts of Ms Santa Khurai and her team from AMANA, who went around the various Meitei relief camps in Imphal East with the relief materials. Her narration of daily experiences during that time, were overwhelming, as she struggled with what was happening around her. In Kangpokpi, we got connected to the Superintendent of Police (SP) of the district, who ensured the safe passage and distribution of the relief materials to different relief camps in his district. Sooner, we were able to collect essential medicines through the India Peace Centre from Nagpur and send it to the District hospital in Kangpokpi, again thanks to the efforts of the SP who ensured the same. A set of 600 mattresses were sent to Kangpokpi district in July, which was distributed through the SP to various relief camps there. The Trulock Theological College, which temporarily shifted to Kangpokpi from Imphal, as it was burned down, received 87 mattresses for their staff and students. 200 mosquito nets were supplied to the Trulock Theological College, Kangpokpi in July. Meanwhile, as situation in other parts of Manipur calmed down, a consignment of 600 mattresses, 600 mosquito nets and 300 torchlights reached Churachandpur last week. These, along with 300 blankets contributed by donors from Karnataka, will soon be distributed among the most needy communities in the district by the Churachandpur District Goodwill Christian Council. Another consignment of mattresses and dry ration is being planned to be supplied to the needy in four villages in Chandel district in the coming days. A free Medical Camp was conducted on the 8th of August in three places in Churachandpur

District, in collaboration with the Kuki Christian Leaders Fellowship Monitoring Cell, Churachandpur. The three places include Hidden Valley School Gangpimol, KBC B. Vengnom and ECA Molnom in Churachandpur district. More than 800 internally displaced persons with diverse illnesses visited the medical camps (Hidden Valley – 223, KBC Vengnom – 221 & ECA Molnom – 362) and after the doctors diagnosed their illness, they were given the required medicines.

We will soon be entering a phase in Manipur where many of the displaced people will require temporary shelters, as the situation takes time to come to normal. Wounds are still fresh for those who have lost their near and dear, fear looms large among many in various communities. Many children are unable to go to schools, coping with the limited facilities in relief camps and other shared temporary facilities. Many in the relief camps are already facing a situation where they are left to fend for themselves, as the supply of relief materials is soon fading away. Youngsters are already looking beyond Manipur, to continue their education in many places that may offer some help. Life needs to continue for them, in spite of their traumatic past. Peace and reconciliation seems a distant reality for many, as they look for a new future to cope with. Besides continuing to provide relief materials to the displaced, it is also our collective responsibility to see how we as a country can provide hope for a better future, in the form of considering long term support. We have to find ways and make spaces, in our minds first, then in our homes and our neighbourhood, to be able to share their pain, collectively. For churches and other such faith groups, our practices of faith have to now concretely reflect in our actions, through empathetic ways of making peace and reconciliation a reality. Seeking your continued prayers and support, as we engage further among the displaced communities in Manipur.

(Fr. Thomas Ninan is an ordained Priest of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, on leave from the Diocese of Delhi, serving as Executive Secretary – Projects at the Christian Service Agency in Nagpur, which is the Diaconal Wing of the National Council of Churches in India. For contributions towards relief work or for further details of engagement, please write to Fr Thomas Ninan at projects@csaindia.org.)

One Extraordinary Human Response That Led to Our Salvation

Lijin Hannah Thomas

The Holy Church emphasizes the point that the heavenly Father did not just select the man Jesus to be Christ at His birth or when He was baptized. Even before He was given the name Jesus, even before He was conceived in Mary's womb, Christ was God and has always been and will always be God. Even when we look through Scripture, Christ is there in the Old Testament from the beginning and throughout all the Scriptures. The Church is adamant that Christ permeates through every word of the Scriptures, just as he permeates through all of eternity. For example, we see in Genesis 1:26, "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.'

When we look at this icon of the creation of Adam, we see that the one who creates is the Word of God, Christ, and that Adam bears the image or face of Christ. When God says "Let Us make man in Our image," God is saying let us make man in the image of Christ. It is not that Christ looks like us but that we look like Him. He is incarnate to teach us how to become truly human in the way he died as a human being. When God says, "Let Us make man in Our likeness," it means that He has created us out of His love and His free will and in that likeness, He has given us free will to choose to love Him, to choose to obey and live in communion with Him. Adam and Eve were living in communion with God in the Garden of Eden. They chose, out of their free will to disobey and were therefore banished from the Garden of Eden. God desires for us to live in communion with Him. Sin had an effect on the world as it brought on death and corruption. This is why it is even more impressive to see throughout Scripture, faithful individuals who have lived a life of holiness.

When the archangel Gabriel came to announce to Mary that she had found favor with God and will bear a son who shall be named Jesus, she had every reason to respond with "No, thank you," or "I'm not old enough yet," or "I will be persecuted" (St. Luke 1:26-33). Instead, St. Mary responded with "How shall this be, since I have no



husband?" and "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." She responded with such humility and openness to the will of God just as Christ is obedient to the will of God unto the Cross (St. Luke 1:34-38; Philippians 2:8). It is in prayer as we get closer to God that we realize how far we truly are from God. It is through consistent prayer that she learned how to pray and how to converse with God. It is in bringing herself consistently in the presence of God through prayer that she built up discernment to understand that it was an angel coming to her and not a demon trying to mislead her. It is in prayer that she grew to respond in such a wise, loving and God-centered response to angel Gabriel.

It is in that response of "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" that St. Mary became the Theotokos, the God bearer. It is in that

response that she expressed her love for her Creator. She demonstrated the *likeness* that she was created in and out of her free will, through her response, she demonstrated how utterly and completely she relied on God with no fear or anxiety. In that response, God allowed the incarnation of Jesus Christ through a virgin woman to save all of humanity. In that response, God allowed Mary to bear the Word of God in her womb and physically deliver Him to His people. As Eve was considered giving birth to humanity, Mary, the New Eve, bore in her womb and gave birth to the one whom the universe cannot contain.

As Mary is the New Eve, Christ is the New Adam who overcame death and brought salvation to the world. We see in the words of St. Irenaeus of Lyons, (a 2nd century church father), from his treatise, *Against Heresies*: “*The Lord, coming into his own creation in visible form, was sustained by his own creation which he himself sustains in being. His obedience on the tree of the cross reversed the disobedience at the tree in Eden; the good news of the truth announced by an angel to Mary, a virgin subject to a husband, undid the evil lie that seduced Eve, a virgin espoused to a husband.*”



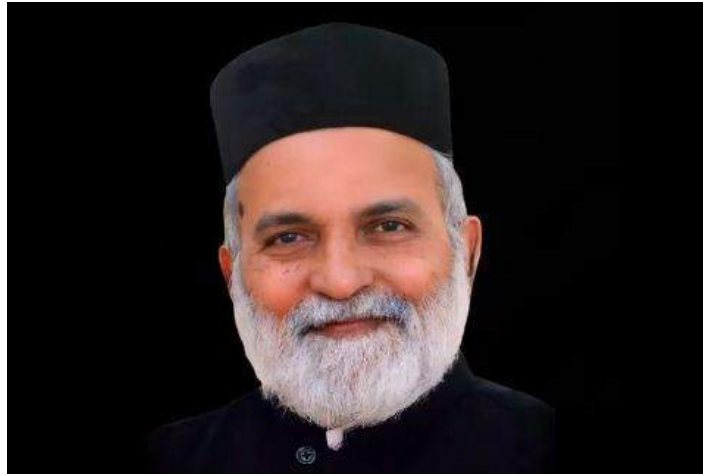
As Eve was seduced by the word of an angel and so fled from God after disobeying his word, Mary in her turn was given the good news by the word of an angel, and bore God in obedience to his word. As Eve was seduced into disobedience to God, so Mary was persuaded into obedience to God; thus the Virgin Mary became the advocate of the virgin Eve.

The one lying in wait for the serpent’s head is the one who was born in the likeness of Adam from the woman, the Virgin. This is the seed spoken of by Paul in the letter to the Galatians: The law of works was in force until the seed should come to whom the promise was made.” (Book 5, Chapter 19).

What can we learn from this young woman’s extraordinary response that led to the salvation of all of humanity? We see that she never points to herself but always points herself and others to Christ. We must first start with working towards being mindful of our thoughts, words, and actions to transform them to be pleasing and obedient to God’s will. In order to do this, we must consistently bring ourselves into God’s presence. Remember that God’s presence is not only at church but everywhere; it’s about being mindful that we are constantly in the presence of God and allowing God to work through us. Through prayer, we learn how to communicate with God and how to get better at recognizing God and God’s will from the distractions of this world. No matter what, we can expect to fall into sin. It’s about practicing to pick ourselves back up every time we fall and continuing to walk towards God that makes the difference. The more we practice that, the more we learn how to overcome and stop dwelling on sinful thoughts, speaking sinful things, and doing sinful actions. What God wills for us is that we continue to strive to be holy as He is holy and to live in communion with God. Thus, let us imitate the Theotokos and ask for strength and His guidance so that we may be willing to live a life in accordance with His will, and be able to say with a pure and honest heart, “Behold, I am a servant of the Lord. Let it be done to me according to Your Word.”

May the memory of St. Mary the God bearer, be a blessing to us and may her prayers be a stronghold for our souls. By the prayers of your Holy Mother, Oh God, have mercy on us and our departed. By her prayers, may we become more like you so that we may fulfil the calling to be the image of Your Son.

(Presbytera Lijin Hannah Thomas, daughter of Very Rev. Raju Daniel Cor-Episcopos and wife of Fr. Shawn Thomas, is a graduate of St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Seminary. Lijin Kochamma is originally from Dallas, but served and worked in New York, and currently serves as a licensed Social Worker in Detroit)



Father Dr. O. Thomas: An Extraordinary Genius Who Combined Theology and Psychology in Pastoral Life

Dr. Siby Tharakan

Father Dr. O. Thomas, who was a leading priest of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, a psychological counsellor, a speaker, and a writer, has made unique contributions in diverse fields such as theology, psychology, pastoral care, writing, teaching, and organizational leadership.

As Principal of Orthodox Theological Seminary, Kottayam, he played a critical role in shaping the next generation of priestly leadership. He was keen on inculcating in them not only theology but also values like humility, self-discipline, and a spirit of service. He demonstrated his organizational acumen by providing leadership services to various movements in the Church. As the General Secretary of the Orthodox Youth Movement, Director General of the Sunday School Association, and Priest Trustee of the Malankara Association, he was instrumental in guiding various organizations in the Church. His leadership skills and guidance have impacted the lives of many students and youth and contributed to the overall growth of the church.

He made invaluable contributions to the field of applied psychology and counselling practice. As the director of the *Prethyasa Counseling Center*, he helped individuals with emotional challenges and worked tire-

lessly to instil hope in their lives. His deep understanding of human nature and empathetic approach enabled him to effectively deal with the emotional problems of those who sought his help. He was able to analyse psychological principles in the light of theology and integrate them to provide inner change and healing.

One of the remarkable books authored by Father Dr. O. Thomas' on Christian family life is, '**Paradise on Earth: A Discourse on Christian Family Life**' (published by Divyabodhanam). This is one of the exceptional books written in Malayalam on the subject. In this book, the author discusses his theological and psychological thoughts, explaining what the Holy Bible teaches about family life with a historical perspective and how those teachings can be applied to modern family life. Furthermore, the book examines the importance of unconditional love, and deep devotion in family relationships. It highlights the need to align expectations with reality and develop unconditional love for family members. The challenges parents face while raising their children on a strong foundation of faith and goodwill are meticulously explored. The book emphasizes the importance, of creating a rich spiritual environment in the family, constructive discipline and encouragement, uniform application of rules, and the

psychological foundation of theological truths.

Biblical Perspectives on Family Life:

According to Father Thomas, the biblical perspectives on male-female relationships and family life depicted in the book of Genesis provide valuable insights into the dynamics of human relationships.

Fr. Thomas' book 'Paradise on Earth' delves into the teachings of Saint Paul the Apostle and Orthodox views on family and marriage, providing a greater understanding of the spiritual origins of marital relationships and the importance of love and sacrifice, and the sacramental nature of marriage. The concept of the Christian family, which emphasizes the importance of selfless love and acknowledges Christ as the head of the family, is discussed in detail. It underlines the divine purpose of the family and provides wisdom in choosing a spouse unwavering in Christian values.

The Genesis narratives indicate that man is incomplete without a suitable partner, emphasizing the importance of companionship in human existence. The unique bond and fellowship shared by a man and a woman, as exemplified by the phrase "*they shall become one flesh,*" cannot be seen in any other living creature. These narratives celebrate the equality and mutual respect between men and women inherent in creation itself. The commission to bear fruit and multiply is also mentioned, highlighting the importance of children in family life.

Thomas Achen rejects any notion of male supremacy and asserts mutual respect and equality. True love involves sacrificial giving and mutual surrender. His book emphasizes on biblical grounds that husbands are called to love their wives sacrificially, while wives are to respond to such sacrificial love by willingly submitting to it.

The teachings of the prophet Hosea emphasize marriage as a covenant between Jehovah and the people of Israel. Hosea's broken family life serves as a metaphor for Israel's relationship with God. His message presents the possibility of repentance, acceptance, and restoration in the context of the marriage covenant.

In the Old Testament wisdom literature, the author succinctly presents the presence of wisdom and moral teachings intertwined with social relations. In particular, the books of Ecclesiastes and Proverbs, believed to have

been written by King Solomon, give advice on the characteristics of a virtuous woman and her responsibilities within and outside the family. These teachings emphasize the importance of wisdom and moral behaviour in family life.

Women in Israeli society held a high position within the family. Proverbs 31 portrays women as active participants in economic affairs and caring for the poor. This portion acknowledges the contributions of women and highlights the importance of their role beyond traditional household responsibilities. Psalms such as 127 and 128 provide a clear understanding of the ideals of family life in the Israelite context. These psalms emphasize the importance of submitting one's intellect and plans to God's direction.

The writings of Saint Paul the Apostle, especially Ephesians 5:22-32, are clear teachings on the spiritual depths of the relationship between husband and wife. The text asserts that St. Paul's intention was to illustrate the deep love between Christ and the Church, rather than to promote patriarchy. The symbolism he used refers to the quality and importance of a marriage relationship rooted in sacrificial love. The relationship between parents and children is also mentioned. He emphasizes the importance of discipline, respect, and obedience. Parents are called upon to raise their children with love and encouragement, fostering an atmosphere of mutual respect within the family.

Marriage as a Covenant and Wisdom Literature's Teachings on Family Life



The Orthodox Church views marriage as a sacrament;



a sacred and mystical union instituted by God. This is in stark contrast to Protestant views of marriage as a mutual covenant. By recognizing marriage as a sacrament, its indissolubility and the divine grace imparted through it are made clear.

The book mentions some elements of the Orthodox wedding service prominently. It also mentions the dedication of rings, hymns, and prayers that emphasize the depth of love between spouses, and the coronation ceremony that represents sacrificial love. It discusses how responsible married couples are not only accountable to each other but also to their parents, society, and the teachings of Christ; emphasizes the importance of caring for parents, especially in their old age and when in need; and encourages couples to contribute positively to society. The inscription “Christ is the head of this family” should pervade all the private and public spheres of family life. A Christian family should embody the love of Christ in action and act as a witness of faith to the world.

Inculcating Christian Culture and Spiritual Activities in Family Life

Being part of a Christian family is more than just meeting social and psychological ideals; True members of the Christian family are to do God’s will. The author refers to Jesus’ words that anyone who does God’s will is considered a part of that great family. Choosing a companion should be done carefully. Finding a life partner should take into account adjustable and non-adjustable characteristics such as commitment to church tradition, financial considerations, lifestyle preferences, educational level, and moral convictions. He emphasizes the impor-

tance of finding partners from families who are united in Christian values and outlook.

Fantasy is part of our lives, but it is important to distinguish between dreams and reality. The text warns against over-reliance on unrealistic expectations and the need to understand what can actually be gained from a marriage relationship.

Unconditional love plays an important role in strengthening all types of relationships, especially within the family. Loving someone based on liking certain qualities in others is ‘conditional’ love. He emphasizes the importance of practicing unconditional love even if one’s parents or family themselves have weaknesses or faults. This love reflects ‘unconditional acceptance’, an example of God’s love for humanity. He suggests facing challenges, finding peace in marriage, trusting in God’s guidance, and maintaining a prayerful attitude. “Accepting reality with grace helps couples grow together and find deeper meaning in their relationship.”

Deep love should extend beyond the spouse to include all family members. The scripture warns against focusing only on the spouse and against showing contempt or hatred towards other family members. He advocates for a holistic understanding of Christian love in which both families experience unconditional love, unity, and happiness.

Challenges and Guidance in Raising Children on a Foundation of Faith and Goodwill

The spiritual environment at home and the way parents communicate significantly influence children’s understanding of faith. Parental conversations, comments about others, and disagreements should reflect Christian values. When family discussions focus on godliness, love, faith, hope, and other virtues, children will be interested in internalizing these values. The spiritual atmosphere in the home should reflect God’s love and grace.

Proper discipline is essential as children grow. Ignoring indiscipline or accepting mindless and cruel punishment can harm children’s character development. Discipline should be delivered in a timely and constructive manner; children should be allowed to learn from their mistakes and develop their character. Discipline helps children understand boundaries and develop a sense of responsibility. Instead of constant criticism, encouragement is key

to increasing children's emotional well-being. Focusing on nurturing and developing their inherent abilities, rather than belittling them for perceived shortcomings, helps children thrive. Positive reinforcement boosts their confidence and motivates them to excel in activities. Encouragement lifts children's spirits and enables them to embrace unique gifts.

Consistency is important in applying rules and values within the family. Respecting the rules equally by all family members will instil in children a sense of fairness and integrity. "Consistency of values builds trust and provides a strong foundation for children's moral development."

Parents play an important role in shaping children's understanding of God and spirituality. By providing love, care, and a safe environment, parents lay the theological foundation for psychological truth. Children's experiences and memories of their parents' love nurture their understanding of God's love. Parents' love serves as a mirror for children to understand God's love and grace.

Addressing Social Issues: Dowry System, Family Planning, and Substance Abuse

The book reminds us that the dowry system has no spiritual basis and is not only against values but also essential to teach believers that the criterion of marriage should not be money, but the cultivation of godly virtues. Churches should stop the practice of accepting marriage fees and play an active role in eliminating the dowry system. Equal rights of sons and daughters to ancestral property should be promoted, and marriage proposals based on financial criteria should be rejected.

Family planning is very important in view of population growth, unemployment, and limited resources. Views differ within the Christian church. Responsible decisions based on personal circumstances, seeking God's guidance, and considering the well-being of individuals and society are important. The church must address the rising divorce rate and its consequences and emphasize the sanctity of marriage and the unity of the family. A stable and loving family environment is essential for children's well-being and growth.

The harmful effects of alcohol, drug abuse, and tobacco on physical and mental health, personal relationships, and family life cannot be ignored. The Church should

ACKNOWLEDGING CHRIST AS THE HEAD OF THE FAMILY AND PRACTISING SELFLESS LOVE ARE ESSENTIAL FOR NURTURING CHRISTIAN FAMILY LIFE.

actively raise awareness against these issues through spiritual organizations and in collaboration with anti-alcohol movements, and initiate programs to address these issues. The foundation of the Christian family is faith in God. Faith in God's providence, raising children in a Christian environment, and living according to God's commandments are necessary for the happiness and prosperity of the family.

Conclusion

Acknowledging Christ as the Head of the family and practising selfless love are essential for nurturing Christian family life. Choosing a spouse who is compatible with Christian values is the primary task of building a Christian family. Fostering healthy family relationships requires a balanced approach; practice unconditional love, accept reality, and cultivate deep love on all levels.

The author, who is also a psychologist, believes that by connecting expectations with reality, loving family members unconditionally, and extending love beyond the spouse in the marriage relationship, satisfaction and harmony can be created in family life. Practicing spiritual activities at home, fostering a good spiritual atmosphere, practicing constructive discipline, giving encouragement, applying the rules uniformly, and understanding the psychological basis of theological truths are necessary to nurture Christian family life. He also says in this book that by prioritizing children's spiritual growth, character formation, and emotional well-being, parents can raise their children to love God and others.

(Dr. Siby Tharakan, Director, Navajyothi MOMS and Founder Director, Vipassana Emotional Support Centre, Kottayam)



PRAYER: AN EFFECTIVE TOOL

Annie K George

Prayer is talking to God. Reading the Bible is God talking to us. Prayer is an effective tool in the hands of a believer. Just as we need food for the body, we have to replenish our souls also. It is important to refresh or restore the soul, hence the need for prayer. Prayer - secret, fervent and believing, lies at the root of all personal devotion.

William Blake says, 'Our task in life is to learn to bear God's Beam of Love'. True prayer is to respond to the true God as he reveals more of himself by his spirit. By praying to God we get mental satisfaction and peace. The quality of our life reflects the quality of our prayer-life and relationship with God who gives us a simple guideline: good thoughts, good words and good deeds. Real prayer is life-creating and life-changing. Various surveys have revealed that people who pray regularly are seen to be composed, quiet and well-settled in life, rather than the ones who do not pray. As Christians we should spend our time expanding our knowledge and awareness about the Almighty God, only then will we realize that much of the energy spent in other things, is a waste of time.

The things that we pray for vary from people to people and individual to individual. Some pray for material things and mental peace, others for cure of diseases or whatever be their problems. It is not easy to describe all that people ask for in prayer. But I would like to specify that we need not worry about the problems we have, because a believer knows for certain, that God has promised to take care of our burdens. "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as

well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble." (Matthew 6: 33-34)

Prayer isn't easy, even though it is one of the most vital parts of our relationship with God. Throughout the Bible there are many examples of powerful and honest prayers that can be used as models. The most famous example is **the Lord's Prayer** (*Matt 6:5-15, Luke 11:1-4*), in which Jesus teaches his disciples to pray. I am adding a few excerpts from some of the notable prayers in the Bible, that have touched me deeply and demonstrate the depth of heartache and joy that can exist in our communication with God.

Jesus' high priestly prayer – *'All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name, which you have given me that they may be one, even as we are one.'* (John 17:10-11)

Moses and Miriam's song of victory – *'I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and my defence, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him.'* (Exodus 15:1-2)

Hannah's prayer of praise – *'The Lord makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts. He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honour.'*

(1 Samuel 2:7-8)

Asaph's Psalm of despair – *'I cry aloud to God and he will hear me. In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord; in the night my hand is stretched out without wearying; my soul refuses to be comforted.'* (Psalm 77:1-2)

David's prayer of repentance – *'Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.'* (Psalm 51:1-2)

Solomon's prayer of dedication – *'O Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like you, in heaven or on earth, keeping covenant and showing steadfast love to your servants who walk before you with all their heart, who have kept with your servant David, my father, what you declared to him. You spoke with your mouth, and with your hand have fulfilled it this day.'* (2 Chronicles 6:14-15)

The Tax Collector's prayers - *The tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!'* (Luke 18:13)

Paul's prayer for the Ephesian church – *'I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him.'* (Eph. 1:16-17)

A place and time to pray: *It is ideal to have a fixed place and timings to pray. Praying in a closed room without any disturbances can help in our personal conversations with God. Though it is understood that our Patriarchs and Prophets prayed seven times a day, we make it a practise to pray in the morning before we start our day, at noon, in the evening and before we retire to bed. However there are no rigorous rules regarding the time and place of prayer. Any time and any place is a good time and a good place for prayer. We know that Jonah prayed and beseeched the Lord from the inside of the big fish and God heard him (Jonah 2:1). Even bedtime became a time of resting in God as I tried to follow the Psalmist's example: "When I remember you on my bed, I meditate on you in the night watches" (Psalm 63:6).*

I feel it is very important to pray incessantly, as Paul says in James 5:16 *"The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."* Even while we are busy with our

daily chores, we can make silent pleas like: *"Lord be with me, guide me, enlighten me, and inspire me."* Above all, we will be satisfied, delighted and grateful to know that the Lord accepts our prayers, as the Psalmist says *"The Lord has heard my supplications; the Lord will receive my prayer."* (Psalms 6:9)

God answers prayers, indeed he does! Some of the notable instances out of the many recorded in the Bible are:

- **Hannah's prayer for fertility:** God blessed her with a son, Samuel, who became a prophet and a judge of Israel. (1 Samuel 1:27-28)

- **Solomon's prayer for wisdom:** God granted him unparalleled wisdom and understanding, as well as wealth and honour. (2 Chronicles 1:10-12)

- **Daniel's prayer for understanding and insight:** God gave him understanding and insight and revealed to him the meaning of Nebuchadnezzar's dream and the future of the kingdoms of the world. (Daniel 9:22)

- **The disciples' prayer for the Holy Spirit:** God poured out the Holy Spirit on them on the day of Pentecost, empowering them to preach the gospel and perform miracles. (Acts 4:31)

- **Hezekiah's prayer for healing:** God added fifteen years to his life and delivered him from the threat of the Assyrian army (Isaiah 38:1-8)

- **God's promise not to destroy the whole world with floods:** Since Noah's time when the earth was destroyed by the floods, God promised never to destroy the earth with water. God gave the rainbow as a sign of His promise. (Genesis 9:11)

Brevity in prayer:

There is a misconception that prayers require many words and long hours. But short prayers equally express emotions and feelings like anguish, sorrow, desperation, repentance, rejoicing, praise and worship. Jesus himself taught his disciples how to pray, advising them on the words to be used and the brevity of prayers, saying: *'When you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.'* (Matthew 6:7-8). Jesus was not against long prayers, but was warning against

lengthy prayers that are repetitive and insincere.

Solomon, the wise, also spoke about the dignity and decorum to be maintained while entering the house of God. He advised reverence and discretion in prayer *‘Do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on Earth, so let your words be few.’* (Ecclesiastes 5:2) Some of the short prayers from the Bible are: The Tax Collector’s prayer: *‘Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner.’* (Luke 18:13); Prayer of two blind men for healing: *‘Lord, Son of David, Have mercy on us.’* (Matthew 20:31); Faith of a Canaanite woman: *‘Lord, help me.’* (Matthew 15:25); the prayer of the Thief on the Cross: *‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’* (Luke 23:42); and at the Stoning of St. Stephen, he prayed: *‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. . . Lord, do not hold this sin against them.’* (Acts 7:59-60).

Postures in Prayer

Communication with God does not require specific physical positions. However, our prayer postures give expression to the attitudes of our hearts. The Biblical accounts involving prayer, often describe the petitioner’s posture. For example, Abraham fell upon his face before God (Genesis 17:3); Moses prayed with his hands outstretched (Exodus 9:27–29); King Solomon both knelt and spread his hands toward Heaven in prayer (I Kings 8:54); Jesus looked up to Heaven and prayed (Mark 6:41, John 11:41, and 17:1).

Just as Jesus took brief intervals and went to the Mount of Olives and to other lovely places, to pray to God the Father, we should also try to retreat from this world and spend some time in communion with nature and God.

Personally, I take much delight in prayer and utilize every opportunity to be in communion with God. This is the happiest time for me, as it consoles me, keeps me strong in faith, tracks my ways, and releases tension. What a blissful moment it is when I have the opportunity to pray quietly and in privacy to God, when I open my

heart to God to comfort me, console me and share my small joys and big sorrows. I always have a yearning for the creator and try to stay in tune with him. My mind is anchored to him and I find solace in him.



Prayer keeps us happy.

A study has revealed that the practise of praying at least once a day is the reason why many Christians are happier than those who don’t pray. According to a study by researchers covering 500 students at

Sheffield Hallam University and the University of Ulster, people who pray daily are less likely to suffer from depression and anxiety and have higher self-esteem than those who pray rarely.

We are in God as fish in water: *‘The soul is in God and God in the soul, just as the fish is in the sea and the sea in the fish.’* This is a quote attributed to St. Catherine of Siena, a 14th-century Italian mystic and saint, in her book titled *‘The Dialogue of St. Catherine of Sienna’*. She speaks about a deep connection between the soul and God, similar to that of the fish and the sea. Just as the sea is not only outside the fish, but also inside its body, its cells and its blood; similarly, God is not only outside the soul, but also inside its essence, its nature and its purpose. Therefore it is important for us to be in tune with God who nourishes the soul and restores it in times of adversity.

My Prayer: Prayer, private or shared, overlaps, affects and nurtures one another. So whenever and wherever you get an opportunity to pray, utilize it by leading others also into prayer. My prayer to the Lord is always: *‘Heavenly father, help me, guide me, inspire me and enlighten me to beseech your presence with me wherever I am, in whatever I do, and whenever I need you. Help me also to guide others into a prayerful life.’*

(Mrs. Annie K George is a Retd. Science Consultant of S.I.E., Poojapura, Thiruvananthapuram. She is a member of St. George Orthodox Cathedral, Palayam, Thiruvananthapuram.)

Stifle the Cacophony, Let Peace Be Your Symphony! Hear the Music, Not the Noise!! Feel Joy, Not Annoyance!!!

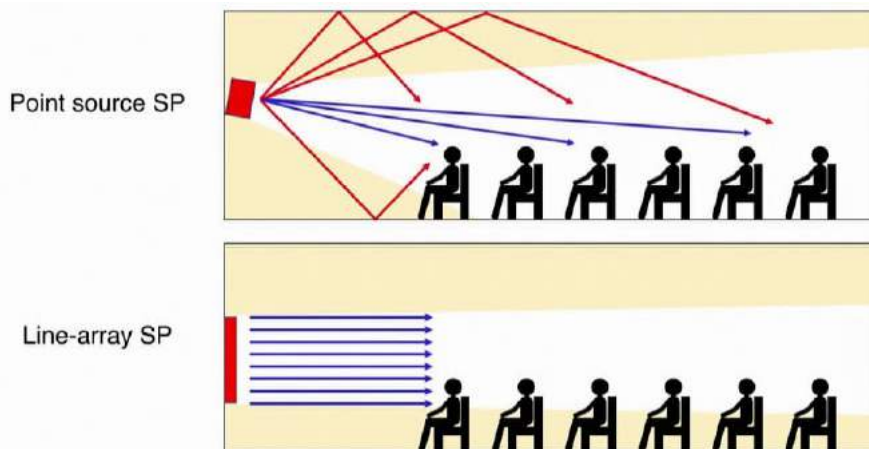
Fr. Mathew Koshy Modisseril

Have you ever wondered why a large number of church-goers prefer to stand outside during Holy Qurbana? Is our congregation losing faith? Is it the long monotonous sermons that bore them? Maybe! But there is another factor that we often overlook. While the clergy and choir might think they are producing fine music, the common worshipper might not be hearing it that way. Of course the music system and instruments might be the latest in the market, the vocals might be beautiful but somehow the overall sound quality is not as good as expected. We hear a lot of complaints ranging from uneven coverage, echoes and ear-piercing screeching sounds. All these cause jarring disruptions in the course of any service and spoils the entire experience. How can we overcome this?

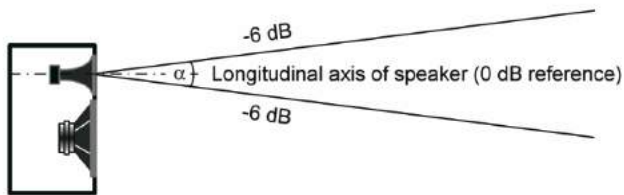
As with everything else, proper planning goes a long way in helping us out. Just as we seek architects when we think of building a house or church, in the same way it is pertinent to seek the services of professionally qualified sound engineers. Here we are neither talking about the eager salesperson at a musical instrument shop, nor the person who occasionally handles the sound systems, but of scientifically trained professionals who have dedicated their time to learn, practice and know how to tweak and dial everything in the right and precise way. We need people who can critically analyse the different products available and select the most apt ones for the said church or parish hall.

The architecture, interior decor, dimensions and construction materials used vary from church to church. Hence the sound waves produced in each behave differently and unpredictably. In essence a sound system that seems perfect for one church might turn out to be disastrous for another.

The interiors of some churches, especially the ceiling, might have a very smooth finish and are thus highly reflective. Such rooms are called ‘live’ rooms and those that are not reflective, are called ‘dead’ rooms. Although the “Point Source” category loudspeakers that we commonly use are relatively safe and efficient in low-reverberative situations, they may not work well in churches with high levels of reflections or reverberations. Speakers that belong to the “Line Source” category may be required in such situations. It is to be noted that the height of the ceiling may have a profound effect on the sound clarity. (Fig 1)



We get a clear sound from a loudspeaker at a certain angle from its acoustic centre. When a person is either standing or sitting, his ears must be in line with this path to get the best experience and to enjoy the feel. Beyond that there will be a loss of -6dB. So, in order to make it audible we often fiddle with the volume dials and increase the volume level which eventually leads to annoying noise effects.

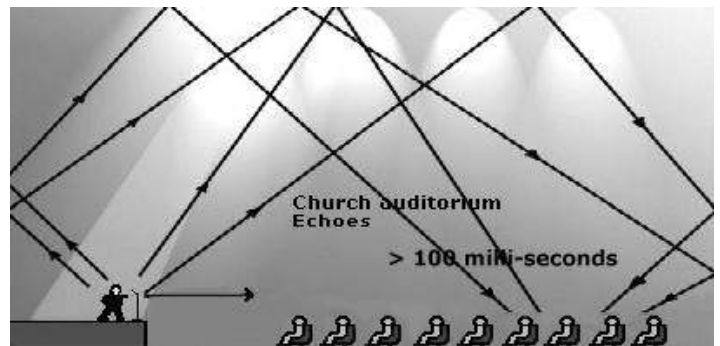


We also hear about the outputs of loudspeakers in Watts. We generally enquire about and compare the speakers according to their Wattage. This is like asking about the capacity of a vehicle's fuel tank when you're going to buy it rather than its mileage in standard test conditions. Watt is the unit of power. It is not what we should take into consideration to evaluate the audibility of our speakers. The unit of sound we hear is dB SPL, dB is *decibel* and SPL is *Sound Pressure Level*.

'dB SPL' is a measure of sound pressure levels in air and related to how many pascals of air is required to move the tympanic membrane of the human ear. It is measured in dB and is a standardised way of comparing the Sound Pressure Levels of different sounds. It is widely used in the field of audiology, which deals with human hearing, and also in audio recording and listening applications. The adjustment of dB SPL measures, accounts for the way that the human auditory systems perceive sound at different frequencies.

Thus our yardstick should be how much dB SPL noise is produced at a distance of one meter per watts. Based on this, it is possible to estimate how much noise will be received at a given distance and calculate the number of loudspeakers to be installed in the church for the best output.

Finally, there is something that we often leave unnoticed. Speakers will respond differently in different churches due to the factors I mentioned earlier. Depending on the characteristics of the reflections, the sound we hear will



be different because some wavelengths tend to be higher or some may decrease according to the surroundings and path they move about. Moreover, when loudspeakers are required in more than one row in lengthy churches, the people standing at the rows far-back, are much more likely to have ambiguity and uneasiness as they will be hearing sounds from loudspeakers in many rows, at multiple places, and at different times based on the speed of the sound. These types of issues can be solved by a process called Sound System Calibration and should be performed after all the devices have been properly installed which will eventually enable us to have a perfectly synchronised experience and create the right ambience to participate in our prayers and worship.

If the sound system thus scientifically installed is to work at optimum efficiency, it must be managed in the proper way by well-trained people. With this objective in mind, Shruthi School of Liturgical Music has started providing scientific training in Live Sound Engineering for places of Worship. Experts who can help you evaluate your options and guide you through the decision making process of installation, purchase and calibration are also available for consultations. So do not hesitate, go ahead and create immersive and impactful audio experiences that will raise worship to higher dimensions.

(Fr. Mathew Koshy Modisseril is an Electro Acoustic Consultant. An Avid Certified User, Fr. Mathew is a Diploma-holder in Sound Engineering and Music Production from NHQ, Ernakulam. He is currently teaching Syriac Language and Sound Reinforcement Course at Sruti School of Liturgical Music and is a Freelance Mixing Engineer. He can be contacted at frmatkoshy@gmail.com; Phone: 9447409452)

NEWS SECTION

Metropolitan Zachariah Mar Anthonios , Go Forth in Peace



Metropolitan Zachariah Mar Anthonios, former Bishop of the Kollam Diocese of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church (MOSC), passed away on 20 August 2023, at the age of 77, at Dr. KM Cherian Institute of Medical Sciences, Kallissery. He had been suffering from ill health for some time and was spending his life in prayerful contemplation at Mar Anthonios Dayara, Mallappally.

Following his demise on the morning of August 20, his funeral was held on 22 August 2023 at the Mount Horeb Mar Elia Chapel in Sasthamkotta. The funeral service was led by H.H. Baselios Mar Thoma Mathews III, Catholicos of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church. During the obituary, His Holiness mentioned

three remarkable virtues that Bishop Anthonios manifested: liturgical consciousness, historical consciousness, and monastic consciousness. He announced that the Church would be in prayerful mourning for the following three days, during which all kinds of celebrations were to be avoided.

H.G. Zachariah Mar Anthonios of blessed memory, was born on 19 July 1946, in Punalur, Kerala. He was ordained as a priest in 1974 and served in various parishes in the Kollam Diocese. He was elected as Metropolitan in 1991 and served as the Bishop of the Kochi Diocese up to the year 2009. He then took charge of the Kollam Diocese until his voluntary retirement in 2022.

Mar Anthonios was known for his simple lifestyle and his commitment to social service. He was also a strong advocate for peace and communal harmony. He will be remembered as a dedicated servant of God and a true leader of the MOSC. His demise is a great loss to the Church and to society as a whole. He will be remembered for his dedication to God, his commitment to social service, and his love for peace.

Oommen Chandy: The Epitome of Christian Witness



Shri. Oommen Chandy, the longest serving member of the Kerala Legislative Assembly (52 years), has left an indelible mark in the hearts and minds of the masses in Kerala. During his illustrious career as Chief Minister, Minister and Leader of the Opposition, he used his power and privileges as a public servant to serve the people of Kerala. Through his 'Jana Samparka Paripady' or 'Mass Contact Program' he spent time and energy to listen to the woes and problems of the common man and anyone who sought his help; set into motion the Government machinery to address and solve their problems and also pursue the matter till the very end. A man of the masses, his approachability and availability brought him into contact with more than a million people at the grassroots and all walks of life, cutting across party lines,

religion and social status. His house was always open to anyone who wanted to meet him. He was so welcoming, compassionate, understanding and sympathetic that he never had a minute to himself, either in public life or private life! No wonder that after his demise, people thronged to pay homage and have a last glimpse of him, delaying the funeral by a good 24 hours!

A staunch Christian who attended Sunday Service in spite of his busy schedule, Oommen Chandy is said to have observed Lent, fasting and prayers as expected of an Orthodox Christian. His simplicity, humility and compassion won many hearts. Puthupalli Church, his own parish and Pampady Dayara were his sanctuary of solace. His home church/parish, in appreciation and profound respect to his nature and stature, arranged a special Burial Vault for him in the courtyard of the church where only priests are buried. Oommen Chandy's grave, adorned with a profusion of flowers, is visited by hundreds of people daily. It is as if it has become a pilgrimage center, with visitors kneeling and praying, lighting candles and seeking his intercession for resolving their problems. Hailing him as the epitome of Christian witness, the Catholicos, His Holiness Baselios Mar Thoma Mathews III described him as a compassionate leader, the embodiment of love, patience and tolerance and a leader whose power did not make him arrogant but more humble and responsible. Oommen Chandy's life and witness to the Christian values of humility, love and compassion, is a model that can be upheld to challenge the politicians and leaders of today, to introspect into their own priorities as leaders and representatives of the people. His life remains the benchmark against which people in power and every Christian will be measured and judged. May his soul rest in peace!

The Visit of His Holiness to Moscow and Rome fosters Ecumenical Relationships



In September 2023, His Holiness Baselios Marthoma Mathews III, Catholicos of the East and Malankara Metropolitan, with a delegation from the Malankara Orthodox Church, set out on a brief international journey spurred the spirit of Christian peace and ecumenism.

His Holiness and his delegation first visited Patriarch Kirill, head of the Russian Orthodox Church, and other dignitaries in Moscow, Russia. His Holiness attended the Holy Eucharist celebrated by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill at the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow, followed by a reception for the guests. The delegation also met with Metropolitan Anthony, head of the External Church Relations department, Russian Orthodox Church. They talked about strengthening and maintaining the ecumenical relationship between the two ancient Churches.

Notably, His Holiness ensured to visit the Leningrad Theological Academy in Saint Petersburg, where His Holiness received higher theological studies from 1977 to 1979. To acknowledge the visit of their cherished alumni, the Academy conferred His Holiness with a Doctoral degree - a reflection of their ardour and respect towards His Holiness and the Malankara Orthodox Church. Moreover, Patriarch Kirill, then a bishop, was His Holiness' rector at the Academy during his time there. It was a blessed moment for the primates of the two sister churches.

The delegation headed by His Holiness comprised of, H.G. Dr. Yuhanon Mar Chrysostom, the Synod Secretary of the Malankara Orthodox Church; H.G. Zachariah Mar Nicholovos; H.G. Dr. Youhanon Mar Demetrios Metropolitan; H.G. Abraham Mar Stephanos; Fr. Dr. Thomas Varghese Amayil, Priest Trustee; Adv.

Biju Oommen, Malankara Association Secretary; Fr. Dr. Johns Abraham Konat, the principal secretary of His Holiness; Fr. Philip Thomas Cor Episcopa; Fr. Ashwin Fernandez, Fr. Baiju Johnson; and Mr. Jacob Mathew, Managing Committee Member.

His Holiness and the delegation visited Pope Francis, the head of the Catholic Church. His Holiness was invited to a private official meeting and lunch with the Pope. Pope Francis referred to His Holiness as "Santità" an Italian term that means "Holiness", showing utmost respect and reverence towards His Holiness. The Catholicos met with the Dicastery for Bishops to promote the values of Christian ecumenism. His Holiness paid visits to significant places, including The Sistine Chapel, the Pope's official residence in Vatican City, and Saint Peter's Basilica, the burial site of St. Peter where he also offered prayers. His Holiness visited the grave of St. Paul and celebrated the Holy Eucharist at the Papal Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls for the faithful of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church community living in Rome - a first for the Malankara Orthodox Church.

These official visits to the two great Churches - the Catholic Church, the largest Christian Church and the Russian Orthodox Church, the largest Orthodox Church - made by His Holiness are momentous and of paramount importance in our Church's endeavours to promote Christian unity in the world and hence, in fostering robust relationships with other Churches. Such efforts by our leaders give hope in our ability and potential as a Church to initiate and sustain peace, not just in the Christian community, but also in society at large.

'Re-establish Peace in Manipur' – Holy Episcopal Synod

The Holy Episcopal Synod of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, held at Devalokam Catholicate Aramana from July 31 to August 4 called for the re-establishment of peace in Manipur. The Holy Synod, presided over by H.H. Baselios Mar Thoma Mathews III, pointed out that the communal violence in Manipur is a blotch on the rich legacy of cultural diversity and religious neutrality in India. The Synod urged the Centre and State Governments to work together to end the communal violence which has continued unabated over the past three months. This is pertinent as there are

concerns that the violence and discord could expand and spread to neighbouring states. Special prayers were conducted for peace in Manipur and the region.

In addition, it was decided that the people displaced due to the violence in Manipur should be rehabilitated and the students who are victims of the violence should be provided alternative education arrangements in the various colleges across the dioceses of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church.

The 15th CCA Assembly launched at Kottayam, Kerala



Kottayam, India: The 15th General Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) was inaugurated by Rev. Prof. Dr. Jerry Pillay, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, at 5pm on 28 September 2023 at the Mammen Mapillai Hall, Kottayam. He also delivered the key note address on the Assembly theme “God Renew Us in Your Spirit and Restore the Creation.” In an impressive Inaugural function, Heads of Churches of the Church of South India, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, Malabar Independent Syrian Church, Malankara Marthoma Syrian Church, Malankara Jacobite Syrian Church, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches, Asia President of the WCC, Chairperson of the Organizing Committee, brought greetings to the CCA on the occasion of the 15th General Assembly and in a symbolic gesture of unity and cooperation, lit the traditional lamp. Welcoming the dignitaries and special guests, delegates and other participants to the Assembly, Dr. Mathews George Chunakara, General Secretary of the Christian Conference of Asia, said that their presence was a ‘demonstration of their individual and collective commitment to the ecumenical movement’ and that the theme affirmed and reaffirmed the determination of the CCA to address the complex issues of Climate change. CCA Moderator Bishop Diloraj from Sri Lanka gave the presidential remarks and CCA Vice-Moderator Bishop Ruel Margiza from the Philippines concluded the session with prayers and benediction.

The Inaugural session began with an Opening Worship led by H.G. Dr. Yakub Mar Irenios of the Malankara Orthodox Church. Interspersed with music, scripture readings, songs and

a beautifully rendered dance on Thanksgiving Praises for God’s creation, the solemn and celebrative Opening Worship had a soulful rendition of praise and salutations to the ‘God of the Cosmos’ by Fr. M P. George, former Director of the Sruti School of Music of the Malankara Orthodox Church and composer of the Assembly theme song ‘God renew us in your Spirit’. The focus on the beauty of God’s creation and the confession of negligence of human beings, metanoia, pardon and hope for restoration and reconciliation, set the tone for the Assembly from 28 September to 3 October 2023.

Pre-Assembly events and thematic plenaries with a focus on the climate emergency, environmental issues, renewal, restoration and care for creation address the main Assembly theme as well as the subthemes ‘Affirming the Will of God’, ‘Dwelling in Harmony with Creation’, and ‘Attaining Life in Its Fullness’.

An interfaith panel session featuring speakers from Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, Sikhism, and Jainism; simultaneous discussions on fifteen different topics related to the main Assembly theme and sub-themes; an Asian Ecumenical Festival and a public gathering which showcase Asia’s rich diversity are some of the interesting highlights of the Assembly.

Founded in 1957 as the first Regional Ecumenical Organisation in the world, CCA has 99 member churches and 17 national councils of churches from 21 countries representing 55 million Christians in Asia. The General Assembly, which normally takes place every five years, is the supreme decision-making body of the CCA. A Biblical reflection on the theme was given by Rev. Idan Topno



Mar Clemis Given the Title “Valiya Metropolitan”

His Grace Kuriakose Mar Clemis, former Metropolitan of Thumpamon and Sultan Bathery dioceses has been given the title of honour ‘Valiya Metropolitan’. His Grace who led the church as Head of the Administrative Council at a crucial time and played a pivotal role in electing and consecrating the current head of the church had recently opted for voluntary retirement from diocese administration. The decision to confer His Grace with the new title was announced in the recent session of the Holy Episcopal Synod

Blessed Alvares Mar Julius Centenary Feast Draws Global Faithful to Goa



In a remarkable display of faith and devotion, the Malankara faithful from around the world gathered in unprecedented numbers for the Centenary Memorial Feast of Blessed Alvares Mar Julius at St. Mary's Church in Ribandar - Panjim, Goa. This event, held on the 21st and 22nd of September 2023, celebrated the life and legacy of a prolific writer, speaker, champion of the poor and oppressed, a patriot, a social reformer, and above all, a great saint and martyr for faith.

The year 2023 marked the Centenary Memorial of Blessed Alvares Mar Julius, and the Malankara Orthodox Church spared no effort in commemorating this momentous occasion. Various dioceses and levels of the church have and are organizing numerous programs to pay tribute to this remarkable figure in their history. However, it was the Feast of Blessed Alvares Mar Julius held at St. Mary's Orthodox Syrian Church in Ribandar, Panjim, where his relics are entombed, that stood out as the focal point of these celebrations.

On the 21st of September, a solemn Holy Mass in Konkani was celebrated by H.G. Yakob Mar Elias, Metropolitan of the Brahmavar Diocese, in the presence of the devout Brahmavar Konkani Orthodox Community. After the Holy Mass, a documentary on Blessed Alvares Mar Julius was showcased for the devotees.

H.G. Yuhanon Mar Diascorus, Metropolitan of Kottayam Diocese, delivered a moving homily, urging devotees not only to remember the memory of Blessed Alvares but also to embrace the future and the vision laid out by him. His Grace unequivocally referred to Blessed Alvares as a Martyr of faith.

The evening continued with a Festal Procession and Apostolic Blessings, followed by a communal dinner served to all the devotees.

On the 22nd of September, the primate of the Malankara Church, H.H. Baselios Marthoma Mathews III, Catholicate of the East, presided over the holy feast Mass.

In his heartfelt homily, the Catholicos referred to Blessed Alvares as a seeker of Truth and a compassionate father to the destitute. His commitment to the Malankara Church was highlighted, and it was noted that although Blessed Alvares did not receive a burial worthy of an Archbishop, countless devotees now flock to his grave seeking his intercession.

The Festal Holy Mass was followed by a grand procession and the Final Benediction.

The celebration continued with a Public Meeting at the Taleigao Community Hall, attended by distinguished guests, including the Hon'ble Governor of Goa, Dr. P.S. Sreedharan Pillai, who served as the Chief Guest. His Holiness Baselios Marthoma Mathews III, Catholicate of the East Inaugurated the programme. H.G. Yakub Mar Elias, Metropolitan of Brahmavar Diocese, presided the programme. Also in attendance were H.G. Geevarghese Mar Coorilos, Metropolitan of Bombay Diocese, H.G. Yuhanon Mar Policarpus, Metropolitan of Angamali Diocese, H.G. Dr. Yahanon Mar Demetrios, Metropolitan of New-Delhi Diocese, H.G. Yuhanon Mar Thevadoros, Metropolitan of Punalur Diocese, and Adv. Biju Oomen, Secretary of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church. During the conference, the renowned humanitarian and social worker 'Daya Bai' received a well-deserved felicitation for her outstanding humanitarian services, in memory of Blessed Alvares of Julius. Daya Bai's journey touched the hearts of the audience, and her unwavering determination to help the needy served as an inspiration to all.

The Feast of Blessed Alvares Mar Julius attracted over 1500 faithful from across the globe, and the service was viewed online by millions of devotees, highlighting the enduring influence and impact of Blessed Alvares on the faithful. His legacy remains unparalleled in the history of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, offering a model of faith, service, and justice to all Christians.

'Pithru Smrithi'

The Malankara Orthodox Church Commemoration Committee organized a "Pithru Smrithi" to pay homage and offer respectful tributes on the occasion of the Centenary Memorial Feast of the Metropolitan H.G. Alvares Mar Julius, the first Metropolitan of the Outside Kerala Diocese and the Silver Jubilee Memorial of the Metropolitan H.G. Philipose Mar Theophilos (former Metropolitan of Bombay and Angamaly Dioceses).

This momentous and solemn event was held on 29th July 2023 at Parumala Seminary, where a huge gathering paid tribute to both the esteemed luminaries of our church. In addition to the numerous participants from different parts of the world, nearly 1050 members from the Pithru Smrithi hosting Dioceses Angamaly, Ahmedabad, Brahmavar and Bombay participated in this historic event. Dr. Shashi Tharoor, Member of Parliament, was the Chief Guest at the Public Meeting.

Dr Paul Manalil, the General Convener of the Commemoration Committee, welcomed the distinguished guests. H.G. Geevarghese Mar Coorilos, President of the Hosting Committee and Metropolitan of Bombay Diocese chaired the meeting; and H.H. Baselios Marthoma Mathews III, Catholicos of the East and Malankara Metropolitan, inaugurated the event through a video message.

In his keynote address Dr. Shashi Tharoor spoke elaborately on the contributions of the two Holy Fathers to the society as well as of the vital importance of preserving India's religious diversity and pluralism which are considered as the greatest strengths of India's civilization.

Dr. Paul Manalil's book *Visudhan Villikkunnu*, a biography of Alvarez Mar Julius and *Malankarayude Sthanapathi*, a biography of Dr. Philipose Mar Theophilus, written by Rev. Fr. Biju P. Thomas, were also released by Dr. Shashi Tharoor MP.

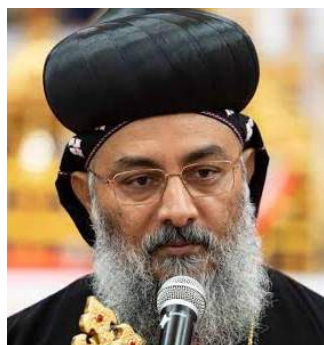
In the second session of the meeting Rev Fr. Dr. K.M. George gave the Keynote address. Rev. Fr. Lawrence David Crasta and Dr.



Joseph P. Varghese presented papers about Alvarez Mar Julius and H.G. Dr. Philipose Mar Theophilus, respectively. Pithru Smrithi Award was presented to Rev. Fr. T.E. Issac, Shri K.V. Mammen and Shri George K. Kurian for their valuable contributions to the Church and community.

The MGOCSM meeting held in the afternoon was presided over by the President H.G. Dr. Abraham Mar Seraphim. H.G. Yakoob Mar Elias, Metropolitan of Brahmavar Diocese, inaugurated the meeting. Priest Trustee Rev Fr. Dr. Thomas Varghese Amayil, Malankara Association Secretary, Adv. Biju Oommen, Parumala Seminary Manager, Very Rev. K.V. Paul Ramban offered felicitation messages. MGOCSM members, Miss Ashna Anna Varghese and Mr. Ruben Kurian Jacob, presented papers on the Life and Witness of Alvarez Mar Julius and Dr. Philipose Mar Theophilos. Chief Coordinator and Bombay Diocesan Secretary, Rev. Fr. Thomas K. Chacko, in his message thanked each and everybody who contributed for the event being organized successfully.

H.G. Abraham Mar Seraphim takes charge as Metropolitan of Thumpamon



H.G. Abraham Mar Seraphim takes on the pastoral responsibilities as the new bishop of the Diocese of Thumpamon.



H.H. Bava Thirumeni appointed H. G. Geevarghese Mar Philoxenos, the Metropolitan of Madras Diocese as the assistant Metropolitan of Bangalore Diocese. He was chosen as a Metropolitan in the Malankara Syrian Christian Association held on 25 th February 2022 at Kolencherry. He received the status of Ramban on

2 nd June 2022 at the Parumala Seminary. He was ordained as a Metropolitan by the name 'Mar Philaxenos' by H.H. Baselios Mar Thoma Mathews III Catholicos on 28 th July 2022 at St. Mary's Cathedral, Pazhanji.

Metropolitan Kuriakose Mar Cleemis who shepherded the diocese for the past fourteen years, stepped down from His Grace's administrative responsibilities. In an auspicious gathering at the St. Basil Aramana Chapel in Pathanamthitta, Metropolitan Mar Cleemis welcomed Metropolitan Mar Seraphim. Various Church dignitaries offered their felicitations and prayers. We wish Metropolitan Mar Cleemis good health and rest for a well deserved retirement. May God grant Metropolitan Mar Seraphim many years of worthy episcopal and pastoral service!



Fr. Dr. Jacob Mathew appointed as the Registrar of FFRC

Rev. Fr. Dr. Jacob Mathew, a faculty member of the Orthodox Theological Seminary, is appointed as the Registrar of the Federated Faculty For Research in Religion and Culture (FFRC). FFRC is the ecumenical research centre constituted by the Orthodox, CSI, and Marthoma Churches in Kerala, and is affiliated to the Senate of Serampore University, Calcutta. He is a member of St. George OSC, Karichal and Vicar, St. Mary's Ennackad of Diocese of Mavelikkara

The International Teenager's Camp For Orthodox Leadership Training: Teen-COLT- 2023



This Annual Leadership Camp for Orthodox Teenagers studying in the Gulf Countries, UK, USA and India was conducted by Fr. Philip Kuruvilla and Ms. Bibi Kuruvilla for the Mission Board of Calcutta Diocese, and was inaugurated by Metropolitan Alexios Mar Eusebius. TEEN COLT is an offshoot of COLT which began in 1989, and has produced several dynamic, Spirit filled young Christian Leaders, both men and women, who are all over the world in positions of secular and Christian leadership. It is especially aimed at youth born and brought up outside Kerala, so they can imbibe the ethos of Orthodoxy and learn about the Mother Church in an atmosphere that is deeply spiritual, and yet fun.

For 4 days, Indian Orthodox Teenagers [aged 15-19] lived together in Mar Baselios Dayara, Njaliakuzhy, and learned about Christian Leadership, about Christ and the Holy Orthodox

Church. This was done through interactive sessions by eminent Church Leaders : Metropolitan HG Yuhanon Mar Melitius, Fr. Dr. K. M. George, Fr. Dr. Reji Mathews, Fr. Dr. Bijesh Philip, Fr. Rijo Geevarghese. All these were stitched together in sessions by Fr. Philip and Ms. Bibi Kuruvilla, like Leadership Skills, Games and Open Discussions on Critical Issues that Teenagers face, plus guiding these teens through morning meditation, Holy Confession and Holy Qurbana. Without doubt, the highlight of the Camp was to have an interactive Question and Answer session with His Holiness the Catholicos, and to receive his blessings.

Add to this that for one day they were part of a historical and religious pilgrimage to places like Vettickal Dayara, Mar Thoman Church, Mulanthuruthy, St Mary's Convent, Kizhakambalam, the Site of the Synod of Diamper and the Oath of the Coonen Cross. The kids were ecstatic. TEEN COLT was also an inward journey allowing participants to feel God's presence, unlock their hidden talents and abilities, and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to achieve their highest potential. TEEN COLT 2024 will be held from July 16-20, 2024.

SPECIAL OLYMPIAD



and unified partners from approximately 190 countries competed in 26 sports, supported by 3,000 coaches and 18,000 volunteers. This year the Indian team comprising 284 athletes won 368 medals, clinching 85 gold, 154 silver and 129 bronze medals. It is a matter of great pride that three girls from the Malankara Orthodox Church represented India in various events. Ms. Blessy Biju, (daughter of the late Biju Varghese and Leelamma Biju- St. George Orthodox Church, Chengaroor, Diocese of Niranam); Ms. Merin Wilson (daughter of Wilson M. G. and Aliyamma Wilson- St. Elias Orthodox Church, Budhanur, Diocese of Chengannur) and Ms. Angelina Pausin; (daughter of Pausin Punnoose and Bindu Pausin- Mar Gregorios Orthodox Church, Gandhi Nagar- Diocese of Ahmedabad), were part of the Indian team. Angelina won 2 silver medals in Skating (Relay) and Skating (100 meters), Blessy a bronze medal in beach volley ball and Merin. Hearty congratulations to Blessy, Merin and Angelina and all the medal winners and the participants of this year's Summer Special Olympics.

The 'Special Olympics World Games' also known as 'Special Olympiad', is an international sporting event for participants with intellectual disabilities. The 2023 Special Olympics World Summer Games, was held from 17 to 25 June 2023 in Berlin, Germany. About 6,500 athletes

Mar Athanasius' book *Orthodoxy Nadappum Sidhanthavum* released



The book *Orthodoxy Nadappum Sidhanthavum* ('Orthodoxy: Praxis and Ideology') authored by Dr. Thomas Mar Athanasius Metropolitan, was released recently by Fr. Dr. Paul Thelekkat . HG Zacharia Mar Nicholovas, HG Dr. Thomas Mar Athanasios , Prof. Dr. M.P. Mathai, Shri. Joy P Jacob and Fr. Binoy Pattakkunnel and many other priests and the lay faithful were present on the occasion. The book focuses on examining the ecclesiology of Eastern Orthodox churches. It also aims to address and improve the practical aspects of key features within Orthodoxy. This book explores various topics, such as the Church and Christ, salvation, authority, discipline, the evolution of the episcopacy, the causes of the church schism, political aspects of the church, the authoritative demeanour of church leaders, the institutional authority, the call and vision of the Church within a market-oriented system etc. The author explores Orthodoxy, the origins and development of Episcopacy and conducts an analysis based on the causes of ecclesiastical divisions. To illustrate the dynamic nature of orthodoxy, the author cites scriptural references and the historical contributions of orthodox theologians. He anticipates that if the members of the Church get the right knowledge of ecclesiology, the schism will eventually be eradicated. This book is a product of that effort too. There is a befitting foreword written by Fr. Dr. K. M. George. It has been published by Current Books, which is well-known for it.

Graph: Iconography Workshop



A rare and unique Workshop on Iconography was conducted by Fr. Rijo Geevarghese at St. Thomas Orthodox Theological Seminary, Nagpur, from 26-30 July 2023. The workshop was blessed and inaugurated by three eminent Bishops of our Church, Mar Demetrius, Mar Gregorios and Mar Polycarpus. Twelve participants from different parts of our country took part in the five-day workshop, which was the first of its kind and was held with the motive to capture young minds and to introduce them to the scope and significance of Iconography in the Malankara Orthodox Church. The serene environment of St. Thomas Orthodox Theological Seminary, Nagpur was just apt for this workshop to be held. This workshop was led by Fr. Rijo Geevarghese who has in-depth knowledge about Iconography. The workshop led the participants through the steps of the art and techniques of Iconography from scratch and made it very interesting by explaining the theology of Icons, different schools of Iconography, and the tradition of Frescoes and Icons in the Malankara Orthodox Church. Icons are symbols that direct our minds to the living God

who sanctified all of matter when He took flesh and became man. Icons are not something that we worship, rather we venerate them, knowing that our veneration is not really for the wood or the paint, but for the Word of God who made all of this possible through His Birth, Life, Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension. Not only does the Orthodox Church support the use of Icons, but urges believers to make use of Icons instead of images in their place of worship, because Icons represent the visible form of an invisible world. Icons, unlike paintings don't speak the mind of the artist who drew it, rather it speaks the mind of the Church. Just like liturgical songs, it must be true to the liturgy and express the faith of the Church.

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for helping to prepare the news

100th Commemoration



*Alwars Mar Julius
of blessed memory*